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## V. Moltchanoff, Russian general

Funeral services for former Russian General Victorin Michailovich Moltchanoff, who fought for Czar Nicholas II against the Communists, will be held at 12:30 p.m. Tuesday at the Holy Trinity Russian Orthodox Church, 1520 Green St.

The general died here Friday. He was 88.

According to a church spokesman, Gen. Moltchanoff was a member of the Siberian Army and the last commander of the "white troops." He left Vladivostok in 1922 to come to America.

He became a citizen and retired 10 years ago as custodial head at a Market Street building.

He is survived by his wife, Lydia; a son, Michael; two daughters, Larissa Sawyer and Mila Mangan; five grandchildren and a great-grandchild.

The Panihida will be conducted at 6 tonight at N. Gray & Co., 1545 Divisadero St., and at 6 p.m. tomorrow at the church.

The family prefers contributions to the Immunology Research Laboratory at Mt. Zion Hospital.

















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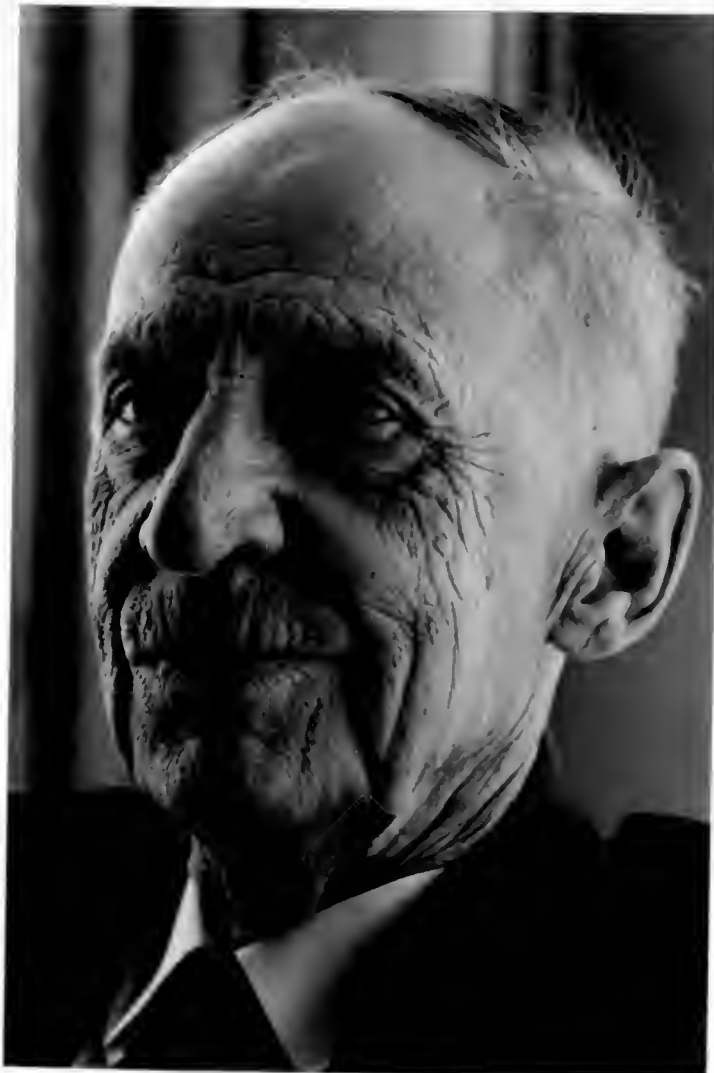
Victorin M. Moltchanoff

THE LAST WHITE GENERAL

An Interview Conducted by

Boris Raymond





General Victorin Moltchanoff  
San Francisco 1968

Photo by M. Ivanitsky



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TABLE OF CONTENTS - Victorin M. Molitchanoff

PREFACE	i
INTRODUCTION	iv
I Early Years and Schooling	1
<u>Military Academy</u>	2
II Service In the Caucasus	10
III Service In the Far East	19
IV Outbreak of World War I	30
<u>German Gas Attack</u>	32
<u>The February Revolution</u>	34
<u>Prisoner of the Germans</u>	39
<u>Return to Soviet Russia and Discharge         from the Army</u>	42
V The White Movement	48
<u>Molitchanoff's First White Command</u>	49
<u>Command of the Izhevs Division</u>	66
<u>White Advance - Spring 1919</u>	74
VI Red Counter-Offensive Begins	83
<u>The Great Ice Retreat</u>	86
<u>The Crossing of Lake Baikal</u>	90
<u>Temporary Shelter in Chita</u>	99
<u>Last White Resistance in Trans-Baikalia</u>	104
VII Retreat Into China	112



VIII	Re-Entry into Russia's Maritime Province	114
	<u>General Moltchanoff Retakes Khabarovsk</u>	118
	<u>Last White Resistance in Soviet Russia</u>	120
	<u>Last White General to Leave Russia</u>	123
IX	Stay in Japan	125
X	Move to America	127
	<u>White Russian Emigres in California</u>	128



## PREFACE

In March, 1966, the Center for Slavic and East European Studies authorized funds for a pilot project to be undertaken by Boris Raymond for the preservation of information on the Russian Revolution and the Russian emigration. As proposed by Mr. Raymond to Professor Gregory Grossman, Chairman, Center for Slavic and East European Studies, the scope of the project would be to:

- a. explore the possibilities of gathering written and printed material for The Bancroft Library and initiating an inventory of similar collections;
- b. begin the compilation of a bibliography on the general topic of Russian emigrants in the Orient and in California; and
- c. conduct a series of interviews with carefully selected members of the Russian community whose recollections of the past would be of permanent historical value.

The work of the project was carried out by Mr. Raymond during the summer of 1966 under the supervision of a faculty committee appointed by Professor Grossman consisting of Professor Nicholas V. Riasanovsky, Department of History, and Professor Oleg Maslenikov, Department of Slavic Languages.

Three oral history interviews were conducted -- with Alexandr Lenkoff, Valentin V. Fedoulenko, and Professor George C. Guins. Mr. Raymond prepared a bibliography of works on the Civil War in Siberia and the Far Eastern Russian emigration that were available in San Francisco collections. A start was made on bringing in materials for the California Russian Emigre Collection in The Bancroft Library.



In his report to the faculty committee at the conclusion of his part of the work, Mr. Raymond proposed an expansion of the project with an emphasis on the study of the history of the Russian emigration in the Far East and on the study of the history of the present structure of the Russian community in San Francisco. He concluded:

Such a study seems important because it represents (1) an example of how a whole stratum of a nation made the adjustment to conditions of exile and how it preserved and expanded the values it already held; (2) it sheds light on the character of the group that left Russia and furnishes a measure of the value of the human material that was lost to Russia because of the Revolution; (3) it sheds light on the problems faced by later anti-Communist refugee groups (Chinese, Hungarian, Cuban); (4) it sheds light on the political events of the twenties, thirties, and forties in the Far East; (5) it sheds light on the causes, strengths, and weaknesses of the anti-Communist fight by the White Russian movement; (6) it is invaluable as one important phase of an eventual definitive study of the Russian Revolution; (7) it sheds light on the cultural contribution that Russians have made and are making to California history.

The destruction of most of the major centers of this Far Eastern emigration (Harbin, Tientsin, Shanghai), the rapid dying off of the emigres, and the sustained loss of documents which is constantly occurring, make it imperative that such a study, if done at all, be done within the next few years.

The three interviews conducted in 1966 comprised the second unit in a Russian Emigre series. The first unit was proposed and conducted in 1958-59 by Dr. Richard Pierce under the faculty supervision of Professor Charles Jelavich and Professor Riasanovsky.





A third unit of the series was authorized in the spring of 1969 by Professor Gregory Grossman, with Professor Nicholas Riasanovsky serving as chairman of the committee in charge of the series. The unit included three interviews conducted by Richard Pierce, one by Boris Raymond, and the continuing collection of papers for the California-Russian Emigre Collection. A listing of all interviews done under the series follows.

This series is part of the program of the Regional Oral History Office to tape record the autobiographies of persons who have contributed significantly to the development of California and the west. The Office is under the administrative supervision of James D. Hart, Director of The Bancroft Library.

Willia K. Baum  
Director  
Regional Oral History Office

1 March 1972  
Regional Oral History Office  
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## INTRODUCTION

General Viktorin Mikhailovich Moltchanoff is indeed a historical figure; there are numerous references to him in various Soviet histories of the Civil War.

It was not an easy matter to gain access to the General for the purposes of an interview; the events of the Civil War years are seldom a pleasant topic of reminiscence to the participants. However, I was fortunate in this matter. My father, Dimitry Gerasimovich Romanoff, and General Moltchanoff were both members of the same Orthodox Church. As a result of this fact, I was able to establish contact with the General socially, in the summer of 1969. After some hesitation, Viktorin Mikhailovich kindly consented to tell me about his Civil War experience. So, while I was applying to the Slavic Institute for a grant to defray the transcription and publication costs, General Moltchanoff began gathering an extensive amount of material which we later used during our interview.

A man in his eighties, Viktorin Mikhailovich is tall, and still as straight as the proverbial military ramrod. His face shows a great deal of energy and his light blue eyes are alive with memories of the past and awareness of the present. He is intensely proud of the men he commanded during the Civil War -- many of whom are still living in the San Francisco Bay Area -- and meets with them regularly at annual reunions.

We met over a period of a month, in January of 1970, at the General's house in San Francisco where he lives very comfortably with his charming wife; and, as is the Russian custom, I was seldom able to leave after the sessions without tasting some of her excellent cooking. For his convenience, I conducted the interview in Russian.



After all of the tapes were recorded, I spent some pleasant but busy days in Berkeley translating them into English, before they were transcribed and sent to the General for verification and editing. Because of his love for precision and accuracy, this chore took the General a long time, but is now finally done, and the manuscript, at last, is ready for publication.

As the interview progressed, the General drew for me a clear and detailed picture not only of the actual military events during the Civil War in Siberia, but what I was even more interested in, a picture of the inner turmoil, self-doubt, and confusion which so handicapped the efforts of the "White" military leaders, fighting a guerrilla war for which few of them were professionally prepared.

Having risen to the command of one of Admiral Kolchack's crack troops, events forced General Moltchanoff to play an increasingly prominent role on the "White" side. While other military and civilian leaders of the "White" movement gradually abandoned the cause, and departed for France or Harbin, General Moltchanoff and his troops remained as the central core of the remaining anti-Bolshevik resistance in Eastern Siberia and the Maritime Provinces.

This personal account of the final stages of the "White" struggle for Eastern Siberia, together with the original documents that General Moltchanoff has now made public for the first time, makes this interview, I believe, a not insignificant footnote to the history of the Russian Civil War.

Boris Raymond [Romanoff]  
Interviewer

2 February 1972  
Department of Sociology  
University of Winnipeg  
Winnipeg 2, Canada



Regional Oral History Office  
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Berkeley, California

CALIFORNIA-RUSSIAN EMIGRÉ SERIES

The following interviews have been undertaken by the Regional Oral History Office, a department of The Bancroft Library.

The Regional Oral History Office was established to tape-record autobiographical interviews with persons who have contributed significantly to the development of the West. The Office, headed by Willa Baum, is under the administrative supervision of James D. Hart, the Director of The Bancroft Library.

First Series: Interviews conducted by Richard A. Pierce and Alton C. Donnelly.

Dotsenko, Paul	<u>The Struggle for the Liberation of Siberia, 1918-1921.</u> 144 pages, 1960 [Pierce]
Malozemoff, Elizabeth	<u>The Life of a Russian Teacher.</u> 444 pages, 1961 [Donnelly]
Shebeko, Boris	<u>Russian Civil War, 1918-1922.</u> 284 pages, 1961 [Pierce]
Shneyeroff, Michael M.	<u>Recollections of the Russian Revolution.</u> 270 pages, 1960 [Pierce]

Second Series: Interviews conducted by Boris Raymond (Romanoff) under the auspices of the Center for Slavic and East European Studies.

Fedoulenko, Valentin V.	<u>Russian Emigré Life in Shanghai.</u> 171 pages, 1967
Guins, George C.	<u>Professor and Government Official: Russia, China, and California.</u> 378 pages, 1966
Lenkoff, Aleksandr N.	<u>Life of a Russian Emigré Soldier.</u> 64 pages, 1967
Volume also contains:	<u>Report to Subcommittee on Russian Emigré Project.</u> 4 pages <u>Bibliography of Works on Far Eastern Emigration.</u> 16 pages

Third Series: Interviews conducted by Richard A. Pierce and Boris Raymond (Romanoff) under the auspices of the Center for Slavic and East European Studies.

Guins, George C.	<u>Impressions of the Russian Imperial Government.</u> 84 pages, 1971 [Pierce]
Marschak, Jacob	<u>Recollections of Kiev and the Northern Caucasus, 1917-18.</u> 78 pages, 1971 [Pierce]
Moltchanoff, Victorin M.	<u>The Last White General.</u> 134 pages, 1972 [Raymond]
Nagy-Talavera, Miklos	<u>Recollections of Soviet Labor Camps, 1949-1955.</u> 100 pages, 1972 [Pierce]





## I EARLY YEARS AND SCHOOLING

Moltchanoff: What would you like to know about me?

Raymond: Well, General Moltchanoff, perhaps we can start with such questions as where you were born, what was your education, and how you came to decide to join the military service.

Moltchanoff: Yes, I'll be happy to tell you all about this. I was born on the fifth of February in 1886 in Chistopol in the Kazan Province. My father was head of the local post office and builder of the new telegraph lines. His salary was small, about forty-five rubles; but a house, wood for the stoves, and kerosene for lighting were free.

My father was the son of a priest, and because of that he sometimes talked about one of us going to the religious academy where the tuition would be free. My mother and my brother and I did not like this idea.

In any case, it happened that when my older brother--who was a year and a half older than I was--graduated from the primary school in our small town, we were both sent to the gymnasium in the neighboring town of Elabuga, which was the uesd\* capital of the Viatskaia Province.\*\* We both finished this gymnasium in 1904. The situation of my father was such that under no condition could he support both of us in a higher education institution, and so I let my older brother

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\* A uesd capital is similar to a county seat in the U.S.A.

\*\* The province, or gubernia, was, before the Revolution, a basic territorial and administrative unit in Russia.



Moltchanoff: have the advantage, and I told him that he could go to Tomsk and enter a higher institute there, whereas I decided to go to Moscow and see what opportunities came along. My idea was that if I would be able to find a way of getting into one of the higher educational institutions in Moscow without having to pay for it, then I would do that. I had hopes that I would be able to get into a higher educational institute without having to pay.

In any case, I arrived in Moscow and stopped in a hotel. I think I paid fifty cents a day for this hotel room. Then I went to the Moscow Engineering Institute and presented them with my secondary school credentials, which I also gave to the Moscow Technical Institute. These were two institutions of higher learning in Moscow at that time besides the University and the Agronomy School. I was not terribly interested in the latter because, although I was interested in agronomy as such, I knew that I couldn't take the entrance examination in this institute without waiting for a whole month, and I didn't have enough money to support myself in Moscow for a whole month.

### Military Academy

Moltchanoff: Anyway, I passed my examinations both at the Engineering and at the Technical Institute, receiving good grades in both examinations. They accepted me in both Institutes, but I couldn't find any way to get money to pay for my entrance fee, so I went to the military academy, which was for me the place of last resort.

At that time the military academies were accepting only people who had finished the middle schools, and these military academies, of course, were free. I was at that time very thin but I loved gymnastics. The medical authorities of the academy checked me and they found that I was healthy, even though I was very skinny. They told me however that although I had passed my physical exam, there was only a quota of 110 openings at the academy and there were already some 500 men that had inscribed themselves on the list, so that I had little hope.

However, in a few days I received a post card notifying me that I had been received. I think that this was due to the fact that I had passed very well my physical examinations as



Moltchanoff: well as the records of my examinations at the two institutes. When I came to the academy, they were very interested in my gymnastic ability and they accepted me gladly.

This was in the month of September, and I had a whole month until October first before I had to make my final decision. During this first month, they hazed us a great deal, forcing us to get up very early and throwing a lot of strict discipline at us to test our stamina. I liked this. Many other people left, but I liked it very much. Out of the two hundred who had been accepted, approximately thirty left. They could not last through this one month.

After the first of October, I took my military pledge of allegiance, and from then on I was considered as a member of the military service. This is how my military service started.

Then the Japanese war began, and they began to push us through faster in the military academy. One of the ways of accelerating was by skipping the usual time that was spent in the field. They would wake us up at four o'clock in the morning. We would first have to shoot on the firing range, and then we would start our schooling. We worked from four in the morning until ten at night.

Raymond: Usually, if this had not been during the wartime, how long would the course have lasted?

Moltchanoff: Two years. That is for the infantry. Three years for the engineering and the artillery schools. These are, of course, all schools for officers, at the end of which you became a second lieutenant.

At first I thought that in this military school there would be little discipline, but it turned out that there was a tremendous discipline there. We had no revolutionaries in our school at all. There was no revolutionary spirit at all even though some of the students there had gone through the universities and had been exposed to radical student activity there. There was, of course, a lot of revolutionary moods among the students in the Moscow University, and even in a number of the theological seminaries there were a lot of revolutionaries. But we had no revolution whatsoever in our military academy.

When the 1905 revolution started, our academy was the only school that was considered by the authorities to be absolutely



Moltchanoff: reliable. Even the Alexander Military Academy in Moscow, where only the children of officers were admitted, even there there were some student disturbances and the government had to restrict these young military students to their barracks, and the First Dragoon Regiment had to be assigned to guard them.

The students in our academy did a lot of work in guarding against the various revolutionary bands that walked around the streets in Moscow. We slept dressed, with our rifles at the ready, and with just a minimum amount of notice we were ready to go out into the streets to keep order.

Raymond: How did you military academy students feel towards the revolutionary students at that time?

Moltchanoff: To answer this, I have to go back a little bit to the realschule in Elabuga. When the war started with Japan, eighteen of us students who had finished together requested to be allowed to volunteer to go to the war. We said that we would not study until we received a reply. We sent this request to the Emperor by telegram through the head of the military district there, a colonel. His name was Samfirov. And he came and said to us, "I will send your telegram, I guarantee you that, but I ask you to continue studying until you receive a reply from the Emperor."

We students agreed, and two days after our conversation, this same colonel arrived in his dress military uniform and read us the Emperor's telegram in which the Emperor thanked us for our patriotic feelings, but requested that we continue studying and finish the realschule and promised that then he would be willing to allow us to go to war against Japan.

We had this kind of mood in school: if a new student arrived in Elabuga from any higher education institution, we would ask him how he believed, and if he said something wrong, we would beat him up. We realschule students beat up those students who we thought had revolutionary and unpatriotic ideas.

Raymond: How do you explain the fact that you had such firm attitudes about the revolution and other students in other schools did not?

Moltchanoff: I explain this exclusively by the fact that our instructors were all patriotic. They were patriots and they openly talked about the difficulties and shortcomings of the government, but showed us that it was impossible to have a perfect government





Moltchanoff: anywhere. At the same time, they were always firmly patriotic. Thus, for instance, I remember one of my teachers, Mikhail Timofeevich Slavin. I give you my word of honor he never taught us any grammar as he was supposed to. He would arrive to class slightly inebriated, but he always told us that Russia needed people who believed in its government.

All these teachers constantly taught us that Russia can be a great country only if there is no revolutionary movement in Russia and that the revolutionary movement would put a halt to the development of the country. These teachers were most loyal, even the Polish teacher we had, who was most devoted to his country, even though we had the idea that Poles were disloyal to the Emperor.

Raymond: This means that your anti-revolutionary mood was based upon the things you learned in school. Was this frequent in Russia, that the teachers were patriots?

Moltchanoff: I can't tell you this. This is a very difficult question, but the fact of the matter is that the revolutionaries usually were successful in infiltrating the church schools because they were usually run by one priest and the revolutionaries were able to get in there.

Raymond: Why were there such revolutionary moods in Russia at that time?

Moltchanoff: I think that it would be impossible to live without revolution. The Russian man always has to be unhappy about something. All you have to do is say some thing to him and he will go. Maybe these are prejudiced ideas of mine, but I don't really respect the Russian people. Our archbishops consider that the Russian peasant is a holy man, a Russian mouzhik is the carrier of the word of God. But I think he is more often a beast.

I will give you one small example. They are beasts. I have seen what they can do. For example, in the Elabuga district there was one landlord, Alashev, whom the peasants themselves had elected to the first government дума. When the 1917 revolution started, the mouzhiks came to him, the very ones who voted for him and said to him, "The revolution has come, we must cut your throat. You are a good man, but we must cut your throat." And they did that. There were nine men guilty of this.

When in 1918 I was chief of the military garrison in Elabuga, they brought me nine men in coffins from the village seven



Moltchanoff: miles away where this had happened. These men had killed the murderers of Alasheev and brought them for me to bury. I chased them away and forced them to bury the victim themselves. I saw what revenge these peasants had wreaked upon the murderers of the landlord. What a revenge! And these same killers later organized their own company in one of my White Army regiments.

Raymond: Then, as I understand you, you consider that the revolutionaries were inevitable.

Moltchanoff: Yes. I don't know of any area where this was not inevitable. For instance, I served in the Caucasus, and I had contact with Turkish officers, and the Turkish officers were also revolutionarily inclined. They considered themselves, as a matter of fact, Young Turks, and opposed their Sultan or Pasha just like we, the younger officers, also considered ourselves Young Turks.

Raymond: Let us return to your life in the military academy. I had asked you why there was no revolution in your academy.

Moltchanoff: All of our officers were excellent men. For instance, I'll give you as an example our captain, Captain Tulaev, a Georgian who commanded the second company. He had a black beard and black eyes, and he dealt with us with a great deal of discipline during our parade period, but after the hours were over, he would come over to me and say, "Viktorin Mikhailovich, would you do this or that for me?" I was portupei, which means a non-commissioned officer, one of the cadet-officers.

During the revolution of 1905, we really showed ourselves off fine. For instance, I'll give you an example of what happened to me. I commanded a squad of the military cadets, and the captain came to me and told me to gather my squad because revolutionaries were besieging the military jail. The captain told me to be careful and not to shoot for nothing, or only to shoot over their heads.

We went there; the gates were closed; the guards were inside. I came very close to the jail and ordered the first rank of the squad to kneel and the second to stay up and to shoot over their heads. Then I shouted, "Go away!" And we shot three times at them. And then they--the revolutionaries, that is--got scared and ran away. We didn't kill anybody because we shot over their heads.

Another thing. Near us, there was a higher technical school.



Moltchanoff: We used to meet the students from this school very often and even drank tea together with these revolutionary students. Most of them weren't really revolutionary; they just had a few agitators that would agitate and force the students to revolution. Among the majority of the students and the military cadets there was no hatred, and we lived very amicably next to each other.

Raymond: Did you ever argue with each other about the revolution?

Moltchanoff: No, we would never do that. The students knew our situation and we knew theirs, and we usually laughed at them and told them that they didn't come to study but in order to create riots. And then we laughed.

Raymond: Who forced these students to be revolutionary?

Moltchanoff: The head of the revolutionary students, agitators, those among them who knew how to speak and how to get people to follow them. But our military cadets always said that they had taken their military pledge and would stay with it. After the 1905 revolution was over, our military academy received from the Alexander Military Academy, where only children of military families were allowed, some of their unreliable students, because we were so reliable. And we were called the Alexis Military Academy, with the heir to the throne being made the honorary chief, or commander, of our academy. This was our reward for our reliable performance during the revolution.

For instance, there was this incident. The second grenadier regiment rebelled on the Sadovaia Ulitsa. Our military academy was ordered to go out there and disarm them. My company was ordered out. Sadovaia Ulitsa is a street that goes around Moscow. In December, it's cold and there's a great deal of snow around. Our commander says, "Gentlemen, we must show what junkers\* are, and we must take them by psychology.

We came up next to them and we started marching with a great deal of smartness. He ordered us to start shooting at the windows, and then he ordered the soldiers in the barracks to throw out their guns through the windows. All of a sudden he said, "In one minute I will blow up the whole building." We had only one hundred junkers and they had over three thousand, but they followed the captain's orders. After this was all over, we asked the soldiers inside, "Why did you surrender?

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\* Students at the military academies.



Moltchanoff: There were so few of us." And the soldiers replied, "You should have seen the way you marched. You were so orderly and so sharp that we were filled with fear."

Raymond: You told me that you had almost no money when you came to Moscow. How did you get into the military academy?

Moltchanoff: The military academy was completely free, and all I had to spend money on was to buy tobacco. So I received a little bit of money from home to do that.

Raymond: What about uniforms and books?

Moltchanoff: Everything of that sort was furnished to us free. We had excellent teachers, not only military science teachers, but engineers, professors of chemistry, of technology, and other subjects. And we received a very good general education, not only a military education, but we studied languages, religion, philosophy, and other subjects.

Raymond: Were there many such military schools in Russia?

Moltchanoff: Yes. In Petrograd there was the Pavlov Military Academy, the Constantine Artillery Military Academy, and the Mikhailov Academy. In Moscow there were two military schools, the Alexander and the Alexei Military Academies. The Alexander was a very old school, but the Alexei was a new one. Also there were academies in Kiev, Kazan, Omsk, Khabarovsk, Irkutsk, and Orenburg.

Raymond: Were there differences among these schools? Which one was considered the highest and most prestigious one?

Moltchanoff: It's very hard to say. From the infantry schools, the best was considered the Pavlov Academy in St. Petersburg. Why it was so considered, I don't really know. When, later on, I became an officer, I found that some of the academies were more loosely disciplined. The Pavlov Academy in St. Petersburg was well known for its fierce discipline. But we didn't have in the Alexei Academy any great deal of fierce discipline. We were all volunteers. It isn't as though they were children of military who had to go to one of these schools.

In America you have West Point, which was an academy for all of the weapons, but we in Russia in the imperial times had military academies for each of the military specialties: cavalry, artillery, engineering, infantry, air. The cavalry academy was the Nikolaev. There was none in Moscow but there





Moltchanoff: was another one in Tver, the Tver Military Academy. Then there was the Chugursk Cavalry Academy in the south. Just those three cavalry schools as I remember.

Raymond: Were there many artillery schools?

Moltchanoff: No. There were two, one in St. Petersburg and one in Odessa, the Sergeev Military Academy. And then of course there were more later.

I graduated from the military academy as portupei. The first sixty graduates got a chance to select from the vacancies existing in the various regiments of the army. We were given complete information about each regiment, where they were stationed, what their history and their traditions were, and if there was a vacancy, we could put in a bid for this vacancy according to the rank we had achieved in our studies, based upon our grades.

Since I had good grades, I was the twenty-third man to choose. Anyway I wanted to join an infantry regiment, one of the very old regiments, the Erevan, Thirteenth grenadier Erevan regiment, which was stationed near Tiflis in the Caucasus. Then the chap who was just ahead of me decided to take this regiment. He had originally wanted to join the artillery, but then changed his mind and took the vacancy in the regiment of my choice.



## II SERVICE IN THE CAUCASUS

Moltchanoff: I didn't know what to do. I was standing in line, having to make a decision. So my captain came up to me and said, "Well, you wanted to go to the Caucasus. Now that this opportunity has disappeared, why don't you join the engineers?" So I took the Second Caucasus Battalion that was stationed in Tiflis. I liked the history of the Second Engineering Battalion, which had participated in all of the Turkish wars and was decorated with the St. George's Cross and all of the other distinctions.

Anyway, when I arrived in Tiflis, I saw that among the officers, there were a lot of revolutionaries. There is a book by Birkin which describe this. It is entitled The Asps' Nest. He had been a lieutenant then in the Caucasus and wrote about this. Among the older officers, Birkin had just arrived from the Japanese war, and won distinction there and for us he was already a well-known man, in whom we had faith, especially the youth, the sixteen second lieutenants who admired him greatly. We found out immediately who had revolutionary ideas among the officers, found them and found that their leader was a lieutenant, Prince Vatchnadze, a social revolutionary. He was not the only one. I will tell you about this. Most of the Georgians were inclined to revolution because they wanted to become independent of Russia. The same is true among many of the Armenians.

Raymond: When did you arrive in Tiflis?

Moltchanoff: We finished the military academy on the 24th of March, 1906. I became right away a second lieutenant. I received a twenty-eight day pass and in April of 1906 I arrived to Tiflis. This was my first time in the Caucasus. I liked the Caucasus very much right away. The Caucasian traditions in our regiments. . .



Moltchanoff: all of the officers by tradition felt themselves to be all for one and one for all. But when the revolution started and the discipline of the soldiers decreased, the officers started splitting into two groups, those who were monarchists and those who were revolutionists of one type or another. Among the officers who had graduated from the infantry schools, there was only one relatively pro-revolutionary officer from the Kiev Military Academy. But I of course belonged to the hard core of the monarchist faction.

One time we went to a camp in Alexandropol, near Kars, which is now on the frontier of Turkey. And it happened that all of a sudden a soldier came into my tent. I was then temporarily commanding a company as I was the oldest second lieutenant there. He informed me that the soldiers had started a riot. They had taken up their guns and decided to go and liberate revolutionary prisoners in a fortress nearby. This was at the height of the revolutionary ferment in 1906.

Anyway, this whole story finished in such a way. I came out with my cigarette in my hand to talk to these soldiers, whose names I knew by then. This one soldier had a cigarette in his mouth, so I knocked it out of his mouth and ordered him to stand at attention as he was supposed to. And the soldier replied, "I don't give a damn; I don't want to serve anymore." So I ordered the other soldiers to arrest him. For this action, all of our battalion was deprived of its guns except for my company. My company had maintained its discipline because I had been firm with the soldiers and we were therefore allowed to keep our weapons.

Raymond: At that time, you, the officers, had not lost your complete authority over the soldiers yet.

Moltchanoff: No, we had not. The soldiers were convinced that they could have faith in me. And I must tell you that I always tried to behave well towards them. I would tell them, "What you do outside of your military duties, I don't care, but when you are on military duty, you must behave and follow orders."

For instance, there was a soldier in my company who got drunk and attacked some Japanese houses in the outskirts of the city. The commander of the garrison arrested him and called me up to ask what he should do with the soldier. I told him to send him to me. When the soldier came, I told him, "You have caused damage in this amount of money," and asked him if he had the money to pay. And the soldier said, "No, your excellency, I do not." And I said, "Okay, I will pay for you,



Moltchanoff: but don't do this again, because I don't have an unlimited amount of money."

The soldiers really liked me for this. I only punished them for breaches of discipline during their service. What they did on their own time I not only didn't punish them for, but I actually protected them.

Raymond: Yourself, how were you paid as a young lieutenant?

Moltchanoff: When I was commander of a company I received 177 rubles in gold, which was a very good salary. But when I began service in the Caucasus, even though we were being paid time and a half for service in the Caucasus, I was receiving only sixty-two rubles and fifty kopecks a month. It was impossible to live on this sum because we had a great number of deductions for such things as library dues, for subscriptions to periodicals and for dinners given to visiting dignitaries. It is true that we had an excellent library. We had a great number of newspapers and an excellent selection of periodicals.

We also had to buy our own uniforms. When we first became officers, we received \$300 for our basic uniform, but of course we had to buy a great number of other things. And we had to replace our boots and all of our uniform as they wore out. We also had to buy all kinds of white uniforms and to take care of their washing and cleaning. In the Caucasus, where it was very hot, this had to be done very often, especially with our military caps, which were white and which became soiled very fast, and we couldn't even clean them, so we were constantly buying new white military hats. This would cost a ruble, and every time it became dirty, we had to throw it away. So it was rather difficult to live on our salary.

Many of our officers shared lodgings together. We were paid on the twentieth of each month and when we signed up for a receipt for our salary, we would have always to take advances. Finally, they started giving us more money.

Raymond: What did your uniforms look like?

Moltchanoff: In summer we had our white military coats, over which we wore our leather belts with a sword and a pistol. These pistols we never removed because we were always forced to go out against revolutionary bands. We patrolled the streets of the city and guarded all kinds of political jails. Even the civilian jails were being guarded by military men. Now when we went to a military camp, we received an extra ruble per





Moltchanoff: day, and after we started getting an increase, it began to be possible to live.

Raymond: Did you need horses in the engineering company?

Moltchanoff: Oh yes, absolutely. I had to have a horse, of course, but I didn't buy my own. I used a government horse. It was very difficult in general to survive on the salary of a junior officer, and many of us had to resign our commissions.

Raymond: How did you spend your free time?

Moltchanoff: You know, we never really had any free time. At least twice a week we had special lectures in the evening and had to solve various tactical problems, and really we didn't have any more than Sunday to rest. During the weekdays we never had time, but on Saturday evenings and on Sundays we had some time for social life. Often we would go to Tiflis and attend the opera or the state theater, and visit other military friends. But we did not mix much with civilians because there was not much opportunity to become friends with them.

Raymond: How would you meet girls?

Moltchanoff: Well, you could go to a club and meet them there, an officers' club, that is, or meet them in friends' houses. But young ladies didn't interest me much because I was very interested in military affairs. If it hadn't been for the civil war, I would never have gotten married. In fact, in our battalion it was considered that those officers who got married should leave the battalion because we Young Turks considered those who got married would have a tail hanging behind them when they went to war. So it was considered bad tone in our regiment for young officers to get married.

Raymond: Did you have much contact with the local Georgian population?

Moltchanoff: Yes, the population was very interesting and I used to enjoy going and eating in their restaurants and walking through the big Tiflis markets. There was a huge market called Maidan. You could get anything you wanted there, but it was a completely Asiatic environment. Later on I got to know Armenian and Georgian officers, and I used to meet them from time to time. Of course, there weren't all that many such occasions, especially because six days a week we were busy. You know, even after we finished our exercises, we had to attend lectures on military subjects.



Raymond: So there was no really brilliant social life.

Moltchanoff: No, absolutely not. I knew no such brilliant social life. How can one have such a life when one's pocket is empty? Do you know that it was during my time there that Stalin robbed the Imperial bank in Tiflis?

Raymond: Did you participate in the arresting of Stalin?

Moltchanoff: No, unfortunately not.

Raymond: How much time did you spend in Tiflis?

Moltchanoff: From 1906 to 1908. Then I drew an unlucky lot and was chosen for transfer to the Far East. Nobody wanted to go to the Far East at that time, and each officer had to pull a lot, which if he chose the wrong stick made him go to the Far East.

The climate in the Caucasus, even though it's rather cool in the winter and hot in the summer, was beautiful. In the summer, we usually went up into the high mountains to make life tolerable and to conduct summer exercises. Of course, for engineers, where we were stationed there wasn't much of a challenge because the rivers over which we built bridges were too small to present much of a challenge. Of course there was the River Kuba, which was a large river, but we didn't get to build many bridges over that.

Raymond: What else did you do in the Caucasus in the two years you were there?

Moltchanoff: Well, one of my most interesting experiences was when I was part of a punitive expedition which was sent into the Caucasian mountains. This expedition went to Persia.

Raymond: How did you happen to be assigned there?

Moltchanoff: I was always sent to the most difficult positions because I was very eager and enjoyed my service very much. I was also sent because I was the expert on explosives and was in command of the explosives squad. This was in 1907 and we went on ships from Baku to Lenkoran, a city not very far away from the Persian border and difficult to reach except by water.

What had happened was that the Russian government gave the Tartars and the Azarbaidzhanians various Russian military ranks which entitled them to wear officers' uniforms. Of course, these were not ranks in the regular army but ranks



Moltchanoff: of the so-called militia, which really carried no authority. The native chieftains, however, enjoyed dressing up in these fancy officers' uniforms and walking through the streets of Tiflis, showing off their uniforms.

Anyway, one of these Persian Azarbaidzhanian chieftains had attacked nineteen neighboring villages and had chased away their cattle, and we were sent on a punitive expedition against him. This expedition travelled up to seven thousand feet, where sometimes in summer it was still snowing, and it was my task to reconnoiter the fortress of this chieftain who had done this and who now wanted to receive an honorary rank from the Tsarist army in exchange for returning the cattle and remaining peaceful.

Anyway, as I was taking these photographs, I saw that a horseman from the fortress was approaching me. He came up and asked in Russian for the ranking officer. I replied that it was I. He told me that the khan requested my presence as a guest in his house. I, of course, knew that once a mountain-eer invites someone to his house, he has nothing to fear, because of their rules of hospitality. So I was not worried.

I agreed to go, and they brought up a horse at a gallop which they offered me to ride up to the castle. In front was the khan's guard, which saluted me. I entered into the fortress and there I was met by the khan, who greeted me very hospitably and assured me that he was not fighting against the Russian Tsar or the Russian army. He said that he took the cattle from the neighboring villages only because they had attacked his village first. He assured me that he was perfectly willing to return the cattle to these villages if the government of Russia would give him the rank of general.

I knew, of course, that the rank of general in the militia was very rarely given, but that the rank of colonel was rather frequently given--again not for the army but for the militia--and I knew that this khan would be very happy to have such a rank because he could then walk through Tiflis and all the soldiers would be forced to salute him, and he would feel very important. So I agreed to report to General Snarsky. Of course, this was very funny, but this was one of the ways that the Russians used to pacify the region.

When I returned to my general and reported to him my conversation with the khan, he immediately demanded to know how I dared to carry on conversations of this type. I answered, "Your Excellency, I am just repeating to you what the khan



Moltchanoff: demanded." And I also told him that there was no way for us to blow up that fortress, because it was not a fortress but only huts of earth and sun dried bricks. The general got angry and placed me under confinement for thirty days. Then he himself invited the khan and made an agreement with the khan to give him the rank of colonel in the militia, but he still remained furious with me.

However, when we arrived back at Tiflis, we were met by the military governor, Count Vorontsov-Dashkov. He came up to me and said, laughing, "I hear that you got jailed for thirty days." I replied, "Exactly so, Your Excellency." Then he said, "Well, I will talk to your general about it. You will not have to sit this time out." And he added, laughing, "The agreement that the general made was, so to speak, the same one you promised the khan, wasn't it?" And he laughed again. A short while later, my general told me that the Count had requested him to relieve me of my punishment and that he was very happy to do so.

As we were returning from this pacification campaign, we had to walk some 240 versts\*. . .

Raymond: Excuse me, General, where were you from Tiflis? To the north or to the south?

Moltchanoff: To the south. On the border with Persia. However, returning, we couldn't find the road back, the short road, that is, so we were told by some local inhabitants that if we went through the mountains we might be able to get through. But nobody went there because there were brigands who sat there and didn't let anybody through. My commander told me to go there and that he would send with me Prince Mikhaladze, sheriff of the county, to act as our translator.

He also gave me ten Cossacks, who would ride on local horses. They had to leave their own horses and use local ones because the local ones were experienced in climbing down mountains by squatting down on their rear legs. So we went off. To the right of us was a precipice. On the other side was a very narrow path, and the guide told us to let go our horses and not to try to rein them because they knew which way to go.

The Caucasus at that time was completely wild. It was beautiful, magnificent, wild, and full of game. I suddenly saw some

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\* A verst is equal to 3,500 feet.





Moltchanoff: waters, volcanic waters and fountains. The guide told us that pretty soon we would arrive at the place where the brigands were located. Indeed, soon enough we heard various calls from around us and one horseman galloped up to me and asked me who we were. I told him that we were Russian officers, that we were trying to get through.

The horseman and the interpreter talked among themselves for a while and then the horseman told me, "Khan So-and-so requests that you move on; don't shoot, because if you do we will kill you all." And I knew that this was so because we could see bunkers with machine guns covering the whole pass, and all we had was pistols and swords. The Khan himself came out shortly and said, "I have never fought with the Emperor nor with the Russian army, and I consider myself a subject of Russia, but I refuse to subject myself to such scum as this Prince Mikhaladze. If it was he alone who had come, we would have killed him, but since he is with you, we will allow him to proceed."

And the Khan invited us to spend the night with him and to eat with him. He fed us well. The food was primarily sheep. Of course, we didn't drink any alcohol because they are Mohammedans and don't drink. The Khan told me that the Russian police didn't help the Emperor but were really thieves, and that Prince Mikhaladze himself was a thief too. The local police would steal everybody's cattle and sell it, and were true enemies of the Emperor. He asked me to report this to the Governor General, which I did when I saw him. The Khan had been to Tiflis several times under an assumed name.

He told me to go to the right after leaving his place and that then I would be able to make my way back. This was of course on our return trip when we were looking for a shortcut.

Raymond: How big was the total expedition?

Moltchanoff: There were two battalions, about 1,000 soldiers and one mountain battery as well as some Cossacks. Anyway, I finally found the path that the Khan had told me about, and in a relatively short time found a good road, and then we moved fast. After we had broken ground on this road, the government hired workers to widen it, and from then on, instead of having to go 240 versts to reach the Persian frontier, this shortcut of forty versts was used.

Raymond: You returned to Tiflis in July of 1907 and remained there until 1908?



Moltchanoff: Yes, and I would never have voluntarily left the service in the Caucasus, but as I already said, the army had a difficult time filling in the required vacancies in the Far East. Officers just did not want to go there voluntarily. For a long time, I was lucky because my immediate superior, General Chervinov, the commander of the brigade, would not let me go. He told me that I was essential to him because I had finished the military academy and I was sustaining the discipline in the battalion. And indeed, I got my soldiers to learn discipline and they started relating to their studies differently and started taking interest in their exercises.

Most other officers just considered that all they had to do was to maintain the ancient engineering regulations which had no relationship to modern times. Such things for instance as building redoubts which would call all of the enemy's artillery fire against them, but which still were required by our outdated military engineering manuals. It seemed like nobody really wanted to review and re-evaluate these practices.

General Chervinov knew perfectly well that I was eager to re-evaluate these old practices. Once when he met me and asked me how things were going, I told him that things were not going too well because nobody gave us modern instruction in military engineering, even though we needed them because we had come from an infantry school. The general looked at me and asked me what I wanted. And I replied, "Your Excellency, for instance, we get orders to build a regimental church. I do this by the book, but all the old manuals are antiquated, and I would want to have more modern education."

And the general said, "All right, I will take on the responsibility of teaching you myself. You and all the other officers who are interested are to report to me. You won't rest and I won't rest, and I will give you extra courses." He added, "Of course, you are right. All these old manuals have to be thrown away, but our chief engineering headquarters won't give us permission to do this. I know perfectly well that the Chief Engineer of the Ministry has not studied recently and is terribly old-fashioned and doesn't know any of the new methods or how to handle himself in the field because he was trained as a fortress engineer."

In 1909 all of this changed because new blood started coming in to the army.



## III SERVICE IN THE FAR EAST

Raymond: You told me that General Chervinov would not let you be transferred to the Far East. How did he manage to do this when transfers were decided by lottery?

Moltchanoff: Well, the way he managed to keep me from being subject to a chance of lottery was by sending me out on non-existent missions while the lottery was being held. Finally I told him, "Your Excellency, twice already, I have avoided taking my chance at the lottery by this subterfuge, and I did this on your orders. But, Your Excellency, this causes me a great deal of embarrassment in front of the other officers, and so I would rather not be exempt from taking my chances." Anyway, when I reached in to get my lot, I pulled out the one that meant I had to go to the Far East.

Raymond: Would you tell me why officers did not want to go to the Far East?

Moltchanoff: Yes, of course. Life there was excellent, but there wasn't a great deal of discipline because most of the officers who were serving in the Far East were officers who had in one way or another committed some kind of violation of discipline.

Raymond: The climate in the Far East was much worse, wasn't it?

Moltchanoff: Yes, but there were some compensations. For instance, there were generous mileage allowances. Also, as far as one's pension went, three years of service in the Far East was equivalent to five years of service in Russia. Also five years of service in the Far East gave you an automatic raise in salary which service in other areas did not give. Furthermore, it was easier to obtain promotions in the Far East.



Raymond: When did you leave Tiflis?

Moltchanoff: In the beginning of 1909. I spent New Year's Eve on the Trans-Siberian Railroad.

Raymond: And when you got to the Far East, which regiment did you join?

Moltchanoff: The Second Eastern Siberian Engineering Battalion.

Raymond: And you arrived there in January, 1909?

Moltchanoff: Yes. It was cold there, of course, but I wasn't particularly afraid because after all, the Kazan region was quite cold too, and I was used to cold weather.

Raymond: And how did you find life in Vladivostok?

Moltchanoff: Oh, life was excellent. We lived on the island, Russkii Ostrov. From there we had no right to leave without the permission of the commander of the battalion. For instance, if I was going to Vladivostock for some reason, I had to ask his permission, and he would typically ask, "For how much?" You wouldn't reply for how many days, but would reply for how much money, that is, in terms of how much money you had in your pocket.

We used to save a lot of money because there was no place to spend it on the island. In Vladivostock, we'd go to a theater first, and then to a night club and we would meet other officers we knew and would have a lot of drinks and a really good time. Two hundred rubles didn't take one very far, after you went to the theater and spent some time in a night club, because a bottle of vodka in a night club instead of forty kopecks would cost five rubles.

But it was all very happy and very gay and everybody enjoyed themselves, and would watch the girls, sit and drink and have a good time. Of course, the officers were allowed to drink as much as they wanted, but drunkenness was frowned upon.

Raymond: Did you eat well in the fortress?

Moltchanoff: Well, I'll tell you, in the Far East, we paid nine rubles a month in the officers' club for two meals, lunch and dinner. The officers had to pay for their meals; the soldiers got their meals free. Of course, when we were very broke in the Caucasus, we ate the same food as the soldiers, paying just





Moltchanoff: a few cents a day, I think something like forty-two kopecks a day. But the food was good. They ate schii\* and meat, kasha and, of course, a lot of bread.

Raymond: Was there much gambling among the officers?

Moltchanoff: Oh yes, there was a lot of gambling, and even now I like to gamble from time to time. But none of us could lose much because we weren't earning all that much, and we never had any extra money to spare.

Raymond: You mentioned how visiting dignitaries used to visit your regiment.

Moltchanoff: In Tiflis, when a visiting dignitary came to see us, he didn't come to us in a car, but in a coach drawn by three horses with a convoy of soldiers who were dressed even better than the convoy of the Emperor. These ceremonies were truly beautiful. But these dignitaries would cost us a pretty penny, us, the officers, because we had to pay for everything. The government after all was poor, and just think, the soldier was paid fifty cents a month and then seventy-five cents a month. He couldn't even buy tobacco with this. At first, the soldiers didn't even receive a portion of sugar for their tea.

We, the Young Turks among the officers, insisted to our older colleagues that we couldn't teach the soldiers proper behavior if we didn't give them enough to smoke and enough sugar for their tea. Many of us officers would buy cigarettes for our soldiers regularly, as well as sugar. And the soldiers liked us for this very much. Even though we ourselves were not paid very well, we spent a good deal of our money on our soldiers. Also, we made it an obligation to know everything about each one of our soldiers, including names and their birthdays. I knew all of the essential facts about each one of the 200 soldiers in my company.

Raymond: Were these soldiers volunteers?

Moltchanoff: No, these were draftees who had to serve three years in the army if they were in the engineering or the artillery and two if they were in the infantry.

Raymond: The majority of the soldiers, were they workers from the city or were they peasants?

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\* Cabbage soup.



Moltchanoff: All of the draftees who were sent to the engineering units were supposed to be literate. Of course, sons of small merchants and anybody else who had some pull tried to get their children into the infantry because they had to serve only two years instead of three years. And because of that, there was always a shortage of enlisted men for the artillery or for the engineers. For instance, once they gave me fourteen men, of whom only four were literate, and the rest were illiterate. Well, I made the report about this and said that I didn't need them. This was in Vladivostok.

They sent me literate men from other infantry companies, but it was obvious that these were the worst soldiers in these companies. What could I do? I gathered the new soldiers together and gave them a tough talk, saying that I knew perfectly well that they were not the model soldiers of their companies. I told them, "You had better be careful. Don't misbehave in my company because you have to put in your required years of military service, and if you don't behave, you will end up in forced labor work." I had no trouble with them after this.

I don't know if this is of any particular interest to you, but shortly after I arrived in Siberia, I got into serious trouble with my commanding officer. I ended up in the company commanded by Captain Cherniavsky, who had been transferred from the Moscow Grenadier Battalion during the Japanese war. He told me immediately that I shouldn't stick my nose into the company's business, that the company was being educated by the non-commissioned officers and that I should not interfere.

I was then the junior officer of the Fourth Engineering Company, and it was here that I saw drunkenness. This captain was a drunk. The officers' club was magnificent there; it had a magnificent library, anything that you wanted practically in all languages. It had a fine tea room for the soldiers and small shops for the various supplies that they might need. For instance, they sold beer there.

Anyway, I told the captain one day that we must teach the soldiers and instill discipline in them. And in fact I started going into the company and checking out their education. My captain kept watching me with anger, and when we used to meet in this officers' club, he would hardly give me his hand.

One day a friend from my old military academy came to visit me, a lieutenant. He came and we spent some time in the officers'



Moltchanoff: club. Then we went to a restaurant on a Saturday after we were dismissed from duty. We went there to have dinner and were sitting at a table having something to eat. We hadn't even had a chance to take a drink when my commanding officer, the captain, came into the restaurant, totally drunk.

We both stood up and saluted him. And he said, "What are you doing here, gentlemen?" I kept quiet, but my friend answered, "Viktonin Mikhailovich has invited me to have dinner." The captain then said, "No, you don't have anything to do here, why don't you go away?" So I told my friend, "Let's go to another restaurant." So we got up from our table and started to leave. While we were in the vestibule and were getting our hats, my commanding officer came into the vestibule, drunk. "You son-of-a-bitch," he said, "you are trying to run away."

I pulled out my pistol and shot him in the head. But the bullet only grazed him. He fell down, and I immediately called the hospital. I then reported to the battalion commander and told him of the whole incident and what had happened. That same evening about six o'clock, there was a court of honor, and the verdict of this court of officers was that I had behaved as an officer should have behaved and that my company commander was to be excluded from the military service and deprived of all his rank and insignias.

Raymond: Was your company commander seriously wounded?

Moltchanoff: No. He was just grazed on the temple by the bullet. When I said this to the commander of the battalion, the latter said, "Why didn't you kill the dog?" And everybody laughed. However, the commander of the brigade had to send me to a military court for conspiracy to kill one's immediate military superior. Had I been found guilty, I would have been sentenced to forced labor.

A general arrived. He was the military prosecutor, and he told me that I would have to be tried and that I would definitely receive some kind of punishment but not to worry too much.

Raymond: Was Cherniavsky present during the trial?

Moltchanoff: Oh, no. He was already sitting in jail under arrest. The two witnesses in the trial were my friend the lieutenant, and of course the waiter at the restaurant where this incident had taken place. Anyway, the verdict of the court was that



Moltchanoff: I was sentenced to thirty days arrest, but my company commander, Cherniavsky, was tried and sentenced to three year's imprisonment in a fortress.

Raymond: Did this incident hurt your military career?

Moltchanoff: No, in no way. Just the opposite, because the whole garrison considered me as a hero. After I served out my time, I told my battalion commander that I felt that it was embarrassing for me to remain in the battalion, and he understood. He allowed me to talk to the general, Alexieb. Anyway, this general understood and promised to transfer me to Irkutsk to the Sixth Eastern Siberian Engineering Battalion.

I went to Irkutsk and reported to the battalion commander. This battalion commander recognized me and said that all of his officers were on my side. He urged me not to feel embarrassed and said that he was placing me in a company where there would soon be need for a new company commander, since the present one was fairly old and would soon be retiring.

This battalion commander, while himself not very effective, noticed that my company started improving soon after I arrived because I was spending much time with my soldiers.

At the end of 1909, our battalion was sent to Vladivostok. I was sent with the advance party of the company to arrange for quarters. We settled on the island known as Russkii Ostrov. As you know, the Russkii Ostrov was right in the middle of the Vladivostok harbor and was a military fortress on which civilians were not allowed except by special pass.

On the island at that time there was stationed the Ninth Siberian Division and a battalion of engineers, in addition to three fortress artillery regiments, which had approximately twenty companies each. Each of these companies had their own district with their own fortress guns.

Raymond: In other words, this island was really a very strong fortress.

Moltchanoff: Yes, indeed. This island was covered with concrete fortifications and underground artillery placements.

It was during the period after we arrived to Vladivostok that we really began to train our soldiers, as well as our junior officers. I commanded the Third Engineering Company. We were busy every day. People talk about drunkenness among the Tsarist army officers. We had no time. I spent every day





Moltchanoff: with the company. I had dinner with the company and in the evenings I gave classes. The only time when I had a chance to leave was after my soldiers had already gone to sleep in the evening. In fact, I had to check their food and practically lived with them.

Raymond: When were you made company commander?

Moltchanoff: I was made company commander in 1910, at the beginning of the year. I was also made first lieutenant.

Raymond: How long did you stay in Vladivostok?

Moltchanoff: For four years, right up to the war in 1914. And all this period I spent learning the military business because everything was being changed during these years. These were the years when a great improvement started taking place in the officers' corps. Officers from our battalion were being sent to special schools in Khabarovsk all the time, each in turn. I, however, being company commander, didn't have a chance to attend such a school. But I spent much time studying anyway.

All of the experience that we had in terms of maneuvers in those years were directed towards being able to handle any new war that might occur with Japan. This is what all our maneuvers were geared toward.

In 1912, I was made a commander of a "Japanese" engineering battalion, during maneuvers that we held near Khabarovsk. My tasks were to build trenches and bridges, and I became familiar with all of the problems of how to fight a battle. Most of the time, these experiences are only available to officers, but I understood that in order for the Russians to be able to retain control of the city of Khabarovsk, they had to absolutely occupy the railroad station of In. This insight was to come in very handy for me during the last days of the civil war, about which I will tell you later.

In any case, all of the studies that we carried out during those years were done with a great deal of serious attention to detail. Of course, many of our senior officers were quite incompetent, but these were gradually retired. And in any case, few of them ever ended up commanding front line troops in the World War.

Raymond: Approximately how many troops were there in Siberia at that time?

Moltchanoff: In Vladivostok, there were no less than 50,000. Then, if a



Moltchanoff: war had started, there would have been two more regiments immediately available. There were enormous refrigerated storage spaces in Vladivostok with enough food and provisions to feed 100,000 people for two years. There were such things as dry bread, conserves, meat from Australia, and all kinds of other supplies. I was there once. You went in underground, and it seemed like there were miles and miles of corridors.

We also had our air fields with small airplanes. After all, there weren't any big ones then. And of course, there was the fleet that was stationed in Vladivostok, especially the destroyers, as well as mining ships. These mining ships were able to mine the entrances to the harbor within two hours of a declaration of war.

Raymond: How about big capital vessels?

Moltchanoff: These vessels had been lost in the war against Japan during the battle of Susima, and we didn't have any there. There were only destroyers and some cruisers. Incidentally, we also had a few small submarines. Of course, they were not as modern as some of the German submarines, but still we had a few.

Raymond: Did you ever associate with the fleet officers?

Moltchanoff: Oh yes, of course. We didn't have any great deal of rivalry between the army and the navy. Right after the Japanese war, there was some bad feeling between the army and the navy, with the army officers accusing the navy of losing the battle of Susima, but actually we all realized that it was the fault of the higher naval command and that the younger officers were fine patriots.

Raymond: You have already hinted that a large change occurred in the army after 1910. Would you care to elaborate on this?

Moltchanoff: Yes. I would say that by 1914 it was absolutely impossible to recognize the army as the same one that had been defeated in 1905 by the Japanese. Our tactics before the Japanese war were always mass tactics with huge infantry attacks in large massed groups. After the Japanese war, our top military staff concluded that this was impermissible and that we should rather learn to establish defenses in concentrated small defensive points. After the defeat in the Japanese-Russian war, there began a great deal of questioning by the younger officers of the top commanders. We called ourselves the Young Turks and we insisted on getting answers as to why we had lost



Moltchanoff: the war.

For instance, we knew that General Kurapatkin had caused enormous losses to occur. But I don't think that he was a traitor. Rather, I think he was just absolutely incompetent. The same thing actually happened to me during the Great War because several times, it was just terrible to realize what incompetent generals we had. You know that the military commander creates the basic attitude of all of his subordinate officers and men. And if the commander is incompetent, then the rest of the unit can't function very well.

The difference after 1905 was that the officers, the junior officers especially, started studying, started to attend lectures. And the higher command would send to the various units speakers, lecturers, and in fact gave us, the younger officers, an opportunity to demand that we receive certain kinds of education if we felt that we were weak in one area or another. What occurred was that Initiative was allowed to the younger ranks of the army. Before this everything was done by the manual and initiative could only come from the top. This of course was impossibly inefficient; you cannot fight by the manual.

So I would say that the main change that occurred after 1905 was that the younger officers started demanding and taking more and more initiative in the education of their troops and in the education of themselves, as well as the resolution of the types of military problems they were presented with. This was why we called ourselves the Young Turks, because the same phenomenon had first occurred in the Turkish army.

There were the men who wanted to study, who wanted to know everything about the subject of the war, and why we had lost the Japanese war. None of the top commanders could explain this defeat adequately because they were afraid to mention very high names. In fact, the discontent among the officers was so great that I considered that what was happening was a true officers' revolution which began to take place in the army. Of course, we were completely loyal to the Emperor and against all socialist influences, but we wanted to study and to rejuvenate the army ranks.

Raymond: Did anybody accuse the Emperor for the fact that he did not personally exercise more of a positive influence on the army?

Moltchanoff: I personally do accuse the Emperor because he was not able to get rid of the incompetent ministers who were misleading us.



Moltchanoff: We, the young officers, were 100 per cent for the Emperor, but we pitied him for being surrounded by incompetents.

Raymond: Did you consider him too weak?

Moltchanoff: No, I never considered that the Emperor was too weak. His whole fault was that he was too Russian, too Christian, that he believed in the words of his advisors, who were in fact lying, but he just couldn't believe this.

Raymond: This means that you, the young officers, did not accuse the Emperor of having had something to do with the defeat of Russia by Japan.

Moltchanoff: No, of course not; we never felt this. What we wanted was that such generals as Kurapatkin be removed.

Raymond: Was there much opposition to you, the young officers, by the generals and the other higher commanders of the army?

Moltchanoff: No, these generals, or at least most of them, tried to help us. For instance, the chief of staff of the Vladivostok fortress, Baron Boudberg, enthusiastically helped us in our program of educating ourselves and the soldiers. During these years from 1905 to 1914, because of the initiative taken by young officers, even the general staff officers gradually began to support reforms in the army and improve it.

They would come and give lectures in the outlying regions of the empire and educate us. But the initiative for this really came from the bottom, from the young officers.

Besides the troops that were stationed in Vladivostok, there were numerous other areas in Siberia where troops were stationed. Let me see, six divisions, three army corps. In addition to this, you must consider that all the Trans-Baikal troops stationed between the Urals and Lake Baikal were also available within a few days notice. There were two divisions, the Second Siberian Army Corps on the other side of Lake Baikal, and then there were a number of divisions in Tomsk. The railroads worked like clockwork so there was no question of being able to transfer these troops in case of need to the Far East.

Raymond: Were there any Russian troops in China on the Chinese Far Eastern Railroad?

Moltchanoff: Yes, there was a whole army corps, but it was not considered





Moltchanoff: part of the regular army but was labelled gendarmerie. This was only a cover up for regular army soldiers, however. It was a political thing to disguise the fact that they were regular army troops who were supposedly under the command of the Ministry of Finance, and not of the War Ministry.

Raymond: Did you indeed spend all your time on military matters only?

Moltchanoff: Yes, completely. You see, I spent so much time training my soldiers that I had no time for anything else besides my own military education. This showed up in the long run, because in 1916, during the Great War, the company that I had commanded in Vladivostok before 1914 distinguished itself for its discipline and for its battle ability. And I received directly from the Emperor an award called the Monarch's Message of Good Will for the preparation of this company for battle during peace time. This I received even though I was no longer connected with the company, having moved away from it a long time before.



#### IV OUTBREAK OF WORLD WAR I

Raymond: When did you start feeling that war was about to break out?

Moltchanoff: You see, we officers started realizing that war was going to break out when we read in the newspapers about the assassination of Grand Duke Ferdinand by the Serbians. We knew that Serbia was going to be pressed by Austria and were fully aware that the Emperor would not allow Serbia to be trampled under the Austrian heel.

After the Austrian ultimatum to Serbia, we had officers' gatherings, and all of us were sure that there would be a war. I requested immediate transfer to the front. This got me into serious trouble once again. I wrote to the commander of the battalion, requesting that he send me to the military theater because I felt that war would be declared any moment.

When the commander of the fortress of Vladivostok heard about this, he ordered me to be arrested for thirty days because I was claiming there would be a war. But I must tell you something. When I was in the military academy, the Grand Duke Konstantine Konstantinovich, who was at that time the commander-in-chief of the military schools, inspected us. As he was passing our ranks he looked at me and said, "Who is this runt? What's the matter with you? Do you need some food?" And he ordered the commander of the military academy to give me special food. It was obvious that he rather liked me, and he told me then that if I ever needed help, I should contact him immediately.

Well, many many years later, right on the eve of the outbreak of the war, I remembered this. Immediately after the war was



Moltchanoff: declared and after I had been condemned to sit for thirty days in prison, I wrote to the Grand Duke Konstantine Konstantinovich himself, remembering what he had said to me many years before. I told him that because I wanted to be on the fighting front, I was told to serve thirty days under arrest. I signed the letter "Staff Captain Moltchanoff (runt)."

In a couple of days, my commander, Captain Voronkevich, called me into his office and said, "Well, you've certainly managed to arrange things, haven't you? We just received an order, a telegram from the staff of the Grand Duke himself, requesting information as to when and where you will be sent to the front." So of course I was sent to the front.

I joined the Fifth Siberian Engineering Battalion on the front lines in September of 1914. This battalion was stationed near Warsaw. In less than a month I began to command this company because the former commander turned out to be a coward who decided not to stay with his company while the company was advancing and ordered me to take over and left.

The first thing that I want to say is that all of us officers were very eager to go to the front because we were afraid that the war would be over before we had a chance to fight. One of the things that surprised me most at the beginning of the war was that the high command did not attempt in any way to save its officer corps from rapid depletion. All the officers were sent into combat with their companies, which meant that most of the officers were killed off right away. This led to tremendous losses among the officer cadre, an unnecessary loss because these officers had no chance really to do anything effective. This meant that these junior officers had to be replaced with poorly trained second lieutenants with only accelerated military educations. But four months is not really enough time to train an officer to lead men.

Another difficulty at the beginning of the war was that many of the higher officers who were inherited from peace time were incompetent and it took a number of months to weed them out and replace them with competent military men.

Towards the end of 1914 the whole front line froze into parallel trenches facing each other without any great possibility for mobility. Even so, the old tactics that the Russian generals had learned in previous wars were employed, and mass attacks were launched through uncovered areas against strongly fortified machine gun positions, leading to



Moltchanoff: enormous losses on our side.

This is the way the year 1914 ended. In 1915, we had great optimism because we thought that we had corrected most of our mistakes of 1914 and that we would once again take the offensive and enter Prussia. The first thing that we did was to attack the Austrians near Lublin. Fighting against the Austrians was very easy because we were taking a great number of Austrian prisoners of war. They were mostly Slavs who didn't want to fight us Russians.

Raymond: Czechoslovacks?

Moltchanoff: No. I wouldn't say Czechs. We had to take Czechs by force. These were primarily Slovenes and Croats.

Then all of a sudden we discover that our artillery have run out of ammunition, and of course, our offensive had to stop. Our infantry ran out of shells too. Then of course, after the German breakthrough, they sent us up north and we ended up defending Riga, where I stayed until practically the end of the war. This war around Riga was a purely defensive trench war, in which there was very little mobility on either side.

By 1917 we were convinced that we would be able to end the war victoriously that year because we began to receive a great deal of ammunition and a great deal of military equipment, and began to feel that we were almost on a par with the Germans in equipment. Towards the middle of 1916, there were organized engineering companies, and I received the command of the engineering company of the Third Siberian Division. This company had over 800 men, and had an anti-gas unit and a camouflage unit.

#### German Gas Attack

Moltchanoff: One of the most terrible attacks that I experienced during the war was a German gas attack, which was started at very short range by the Germans, who used chlorine gas. I was only 200 meters behind our front line.

I was reading a newspaper from Warsaw, a front-line newspaper, and it said that the Germans were using gas, and that the





Moltchanoff: only thing that would save you would be a simple wet rag, through which you could breathe. This was the first time I read about this. None of us had ever experienced gas attacks before.

Just then my orderly came in and shouted, "Gas attack!" Of course, at this time, we had absolutely no masks or anything else of the sort. I had only one squad with me. Three other squads were ahead on the front line. All the men of these three squads died, and the only squad that was left was the one around me in reserve. However, they managed to save themselves by breathing the way I told them through wet rags. I saw men falling to the ground, trying to breathe, and they were breathing extra amounts of gas because they were close to the ground, and dying. All of the men who were guarding our trenches in this area either died or ran away.

The guns that my one squad had wouldn't work, so I ordered them to clean the guns as best they could. The Germans got up in masks and started attacking us, but we started shooting at them with our few guns and they got scared and stopped their advance, fearing that our bullets might pierce their gas masks. Anyway, no Russian reinforcements could reach me because I was surrounded by gases.

Towards evening, I remember coming to in the hospital. I didn't know how I got there but later I was told that finally, after the reinforcements came at night to relieve me, I keeled over and went unconscious after reporting. The Germans had some kind of confusion because they had stopped their attack, whereas they could have gone right through our lines since there was hardly anybody defending them.

Of course the real thing that saved the situation was that two soldiers had gotten drunk and had hidden away in a little earth hut that was very low and into which the gas couldn't leak. When they came to, they were in good shape and they knew how to operate the machine guns, which they started firing at the Germans who were then advancing.

As I was lying in the hospital, all kinds of doctors came to see me from Petrograd, to inspect me. All these doctors asked me all kinds of questions and began to really bother and torture me with their questions. So I thought, what the hell can I do? Finally I decided to run away from the hospital without military permission. Fortunately, not far away from the hospital, I bumped into a carriage with supplies going to my company, and I took a ride with them. This is the



Moltchanoff: reason why the commander of the army corps, General of Infantry Vasiliev, was angry with me. He asked me, "How dare you leave the position without permission?" And I said, "But I didn't." At this point Colonel Delnikov, who was a witness to all this, said, "Your Excellency, you're wrong," and told the whole story of how I defended these trenches. I was then proposed for decoration with the St. George's Cross, but the general did not approve it. I don't know why. I finally got my St. George's Cross from Admiral Kolchak during the Civil War.

### The February Revolution

Raymond: General Moltchanoff, where were you when the first revolution of February, 1917, started?

Moltchanoff: I was near Riga. I already knew in the summer of 1916 that there were a lot of revolutionary sentiments being expressed by people in high positions in the capital. For instance, a certain Gutchkov came to the front lines in the summer of 1916 to attend the holiday of the Ninth Siberian regiment. I was there, of course. This was a dinner served near the front. And I heard Gutchkov say such things as, for instance, that our government is weak.

I then turned to the rest of the officers and said, "Gentlemen, are we going to allow this scoundrel to speak this way about the government?" This is the very Gutchkov who demanded the resignation of the Tsar later on. He was a real scoundrel, you know. So all the officers started shouting, "Stop saying revolutionary things!" And we said, "We don't want to hear any of this rubbish." So General Tricovski said, "You know, there's a lot of strange discontent in Petrograd, and I even had secret orders to prepare for a march on Petrograd to arrest disturbances should they arise."

On the front line however there were no disturbances to speak of. The only thing was that the soldiers began to be issued, instead of dry peas for soup, chechevilza (poor quality wheat), not very tasty if you don't know how to prepare it. In fact, some of it was inedible. I figured out by talking to doctors and others how to make it tasty by boiling it five times, changing water each time, and indeed, it was quite tasty and my soldiers always ate well.



Moltchanoff: Suddenly signs appeared on trees. These signs said, "Do not eat the worthless chechevilza which you are being served. Officers don't have to eat it. Why should we?" I called one of my staff sergeants and ordered him to see to it that such signs did not appear in our area, because the chechevilza that we served was edible and nobody was hungry in our company. I also ordered my medical orderly to explain to the assembled soldiers the food value of this grain and that it was as nutritious as peas were.

Of course, other companies didn't do this, and one day a military scribe from another army unit came and told me that there was going to be trouble in the regiment. This was in the fall of 1916. He told me that agitators were coming to see the soldiers at night, telling them that the revolution was coming and that they should all be prepared to follow it.

However, in my company we had no problems with food, and therefore little revolutionary agitation. In fact, I had a whole reserve of smoked fish which had been sent me from the Volga by some friends, and I had also saved salted pork fat. I had always ordered my men to pick white mushrooms, which were dried out by local peasants at night. In this way, whenever there was a supply crisis and a shortage, I was able to feed the company from these private reserve stocks, and the men's morale was maintained very high.

In 1917 there's no question that the food that we received most of the time was excellent, with the exception of this so-called gruel, chechevilza. For most of the year we had plenty of supplies, including meat and everything else. I never heard of such a thing as that there would not be enough bread on the northern front. It might be that in some other areas there were such shortages.

With the coming of the Revolution, we got a much worse supply situation. However, there were many revolutionary agitators in 1916, and there was no question that there were bad moods among the soldiery. This started gradually because of individual agitation. In my company, however, the morale of my soldiers was good, right up to the very end. And since everybody wanted the war to be over, we officers also said, "Of course, we want the war to be over too; there's no question about that." And therefore, right up to the time the Tsar abdicated, I had no problem whatsoever with discipline among my soldiers. But then, of course, the moment the Revolution started everything started falling apart.



Raymond: Could you tell me how you first heard about the Tsar's abdication?

Moltchanoff: I'll tell you. When once we were together with the division commander whose headquarters was not far away from where I was stationed, I was in his headquarters and he told me, "You know that I heard rumors of the fact that the Emperor has abdicated." Actually we only found out twenty-four hours later that he had abdicated. I have no idea who held up this news. And he asked me, "Was everybody happy that this happened?" I said, "No. Nobody was happy at all." In fact, my fourth platoon was led by Sergeant Vasily Novitsky, and he told me once, "You know, Captain, if you go with the Revolution, we won't follow you." And I was amazed and I said, "Well, what will you do?" And he said, "Well, we'll start beating and shooting people who follow the Revolution."

This was said to me even after the Emperor's abdication--"We want to end the war, but we don't want to lose and go into German captivity." And after the abdication everybody felt sorry for the Emperor, and nobody blamed him; but of course a number of soldiers did say, "It is a pity that he had a German for a wife." And I had a hard time explaining this. I tried to tell them that all of the ruling families had intermarried, and actually the Empress had become a Russian. But most of the soldiers were saying, "He should have married a Russian, even one of non-royal blood, because by marrying her he would have elevated her. He should not have married the German princess."

When the Revolution began, soldiers came to me and said, within a few days after the Revolution, "We want to have a meeting." These were elected delegates from all units of my company. I said, "Sure. Gather together at such-and-such a time and I'll come with the officers and we will talk." As soon as I came, somebody asked me, "Why are you not a socialist revolutionary?" And I said, "Well, are you a socialist revolutionary?" And he said, "Yes." And then I said, "Well, what does that mean--to be a socialist revolutionary?" And the more I pressed him the more obvious it became that he didn't know what such a person was.

And then I asked, "Okay, how many of you soldiers are socialists?" And the spokesman of the meeting said, "Well, we must assume that everybody's a socialist." And I said, "No, don't answer for everybody. I don't think that anybody here really understands what a socialist or a revolutionary is. I don't certainly." I said to my company assembled at this





Moltchanoff: meeting, "You see, I'm an officer, and I didn't study politics; I studied military business." And then they told me, "We will make you become a revolutionary." And I said, "How are you going to try to make me do this, by force?" And some of them grumbled and said, "Yes, by force." And I said, "Well, you better watch out, because I sleep with my pistol and I will not hesitate to discharge it. And," I said, "I never miss." That night somebody stole my pistol and also stole a very nice jacket belonging to my orderly.

Raymond: Was this in February?

Moltchanoff: No, this was already in March. In February things were still quiet. So I called my orderly and I told him to tell the soldiers that they should return my pistol because I had more than one pistol, so what was the point of stealing this one? And I made them feel guilty about this, and somebody threw my stolen pistol into my tent one time when I wasn't there.

Then I told my soldiers, "I don't want to come to your meetings anymore. Attend the meetings. Have as many meetings as you want to, but don't bother me with them. I'm leaving them alone. And I have made public declaration that I will no longer meet with you people." Then they wrote two long sheets full of statements about me, saying what a good officer I was and how I took good care of them and how I fed them well and protected them in every way, but that now that the Revolution had come, "He," that is me, "does not suit the times."

There was a head (president) of the soldiers and officers deputies association of the Twelfth Army who was a Jew from Riga, an attorney. He came to see me, and when I showed him this document he said, "The document that these soldiers gave you would entitle you to become almost a commander-in-chief, but these people write to you and say that you can't be even a company commander because you don't fit the Revolution." Anyway, I finally said goodbye to these soldiers. This was already in the winter of 1917, and the Bolsheviks had just taken over the government.

I went to my new assignment which was that of the staff officer for all engineering affairs of the army corps. The existing chief engineer had just been retired. Anyway, I couldn't be appointed without elections, so the staff, ten men, said, "Well, let's elect Moltchanoff. There's nobody else who's a candidate, so Moltchanoff automatically assumes



Moltchanoff: this post." This was a gay time. As army corps commander they elected not one but three people--some second lieutenant, a medical corpsman, and a sergeant. The junior lieutenant was a nice but foolish chap. I had to report on all engineering affairs to this "troika" that was supposed to be the commander of the corps.

Raymond: What happened to the former commander of the corps?

Moltchanoff: This was an old general who was still living there. Even the Bolsheviks liked him, and nobody bothered him. But he lived nearby and did not interfere with anything that was going on.

Raymond: Why did you not run away at this time?

Moltchanoff: I'll tell you why. Because when some of the officers ran away, like the chief engineer of the army corps who ran away to the south, they immediately put a guard of two men next to me, and wherever I went I was accompanied by these two men. Furthermore, they gave me a very interesting assignment of trying to save the Russian military property from the advancing German army.

This material consisted of a great deal of engineering equipment, of artillery equipment, and especially of such things as telephone and other communications equipment. They gave me a car, and I had to go from place to place driven around by a chauffeur trying to organize this evacuation. This was all done under the orders of the new Red Army command. Our army was commanded by some generals and commissars.

Raymond: Was this then the Red Army?

Moltchanoff: No. The Red Army was being formed elsewhere. This was the old army which was gradually being dissolved but was still retaining positions until the armistice with the Germans. This old army had a general at its head. Unfortunately, I succeeded in only being able to evacuate one railroad train of equipment--twenty-six railroad cars--mostly very expensive telephone equipment as well as artillery shells which I sent toward Petrograd away from the Germans.

Unfortunately, they were not able to supply me with any more trains because the railroads had just stopped working. Before this, especially up to 1916, the railroad worked like clockwork. Under Kerensky it started already deteriorating,



Moltchanoff: and here, well we just didn't have any trains at all.

### Prisoner of the Germans

Moltchanoff: All of a sudden in February of 1918, the Germans started advancing. And at that time I was at the railroad station called Venden where I was trying to get just any kind of a railroad train in order to save the medical supplies that were lying around stored in that area, supplies of which we were very, very short in the cities.

I was sitting in a small room, and all of a sudden I heard German soldiers ordering people to stop. I didn't know what to do, so I broke a window and started firing my pistol out of the window. Some German soldier threw a hand grenade into the room through the same window and wounded me. Both my legs got shrapnel hits, and my little pet dog, which I was carrying on my chest and which I had had with me since the beginning of the war in 1914 was killed right under me.

At that time, of course, I was alone except for my orderly, a Ukrainian fellow by the name of Seech, who was extremely loyal to me and who refused to leave me even when other soldiers threatened to kill him for being so subservient to an officer. He was there with me, and he jumped over a fence and gave me his hand so as to help me climb over the fence, but I found that I couldn't move, that my legs wouldn't move. This is how the Germans captured me, and I ended up as a prisoner-of-war back in Venden again in one of our own hospitals but now being run by the German medical corps.

One of the Germans started talking to me in Russian. He was one of those Balts who had run away when the Bolsheviks took over. Many of these Balts went over to the German side.

At first I felt very bad, because they didn't get to minding my wounds until about twenty-four hours after I was wounded. They had almost no medical supplies. They put me in the hospital; the doctors were Germans, and the nurses were all Latvians. I had four wounds in each leg, and it was only last year, in 1968, that the last piece of metal shrapnel finally came out of my leg. The doctors told me small pieces would come out themselves. It was just a small piece, but it had given me trouble throughout my life.



Moltchanoff: While I was lying there, I realized that my left leg was completely numb and I couldn't move it. So the German doctor wanted to operate and cut the leg off, but I succeeded in talking him into giving me some massages--uninterrupted massage over a number of days so as to restore the circulation of blood. And the German doctor understood this and agreed to try and see if this would work. So, one nurse after another massaged my leg hour after hour.

One night all of a sudden I woke up and I realized, "Oh my God, I have pain in my leg." So I called the nurse and she got the doctor to come, and the doctor said, "Well, your leg is saved." I stayed in this hospital for quite a while. The food that they gave me was terrible. The Germans had absolutely no food. They were hungry themselves. The best thing they could give was fried herring. They didn't even have bandages or iodine. What little equipment they had in the hospital came from the captured equipment they got from the Russians.

The Germans were amazing soldiers, really marvelous soldiers. What a discipline they had, even when they had nothing. For instance, the bread they ate, the so-called Kriegsbrot which consisted primarily of some kind of artificial cellulose and very little wheat. It was hard as a board and had to be cut with a saw. They had no fats. What they had they called Hindenburg butter, which was some kind of a mixture of fruits and berries which was pressed and then used to spread on bread. In fact, they had nothing at all but salt herring and potatoes. But I taught them not to fry the herring, because I showed them how to eat raw herring, which of course is the way we ate it in Russia.

I was wounded on the twentieth of February, 1918, and I stayed in this hospital until April. I don't remember when exactly in April. And then I had to go every week as a prisoner-of-war to the German commander of the garrison. The doctors saved me by insisting that I stay at the hospital because otherwise the Germans would have evacuated me to the rear where I would have certainly died as many others did of hunger.

Other Russian officers who were prisoners-of-war of the Germans immediately started to put their epaulettes back on and asked me why I would not put mine on. I said to them, "No, I won't. Did you get these epaulettes yourself? Who took them off? The Bolsheviks took them off, didn't they? And then you go ahead and put them on by yourself." I said,





Moltchanoff: "No, I will not put my epaulettes on by myself."

I was regularly reporting to a German lieutenant whose name was Walther Rin, and he kept telling me every time he saw me that all I needed to do to get out of the area where I was was to have a pass signed by him. On his desk he had a set of passes already prepared. All he needed to do was to sign his name and I would have a pass which I could use to escape out of Venden and cross back across the lines and return home. He kept leaving the office very ostentatiously, sort of hinting to me that I should take one of these passes and forge his signature. Now I must tell you that I had a natural talent for imitating other people's handwriting. I should have possibly been a forger of bank notes, but I was not. For a long time I sat thinking about whether or not I should take one of these passes.

Raymond: Why didn't this lieutenant sign a pass for you himself?

Moltchanoff: Well, he was a German officer, and this would have been against his honor. He didn't have the right to do this, because after all I was a military captive. But he did want me to go back home. One day he smiled and left and I took one of these passes and signed his name.

By the way, Red forces were stationed north of Pskov. This was the last town which was occupied by the Germans. After that it was already the front line. Anyway, they told me there, "When you arrive at the last station, get off on the right and get a peasant to take you through the various German military outposts." When I got off, the peasants asked me for a thousand rubles, but of course I didn't have any such thing, so I showed him all I had, which was 270 Kerensky rubles. Finally one of these peasants shook his head and agreed to take me.

As he was driving through the German posts, he smiled at each of the guards and took off his hat and said, "Gutten tag, gutten morgen." And the German soldiers let him through. Finally, when we reached the last of the German military outposts, he avoided it because he knew that there they would not let him through. These muzhiks were very clever; they knew everything.



Return to Soviet Russia and Discharge from the Army

Moltchanoff: Finally I arrived at the Soviet post. Here I joined one of the front line regiments. The regiment commander, a young second lieutenant who was a former officer, had a whole lot of all kinds of girls at his headquarters and had a good time for himself. He gave me a pass to Yaroslavl, where the headquarters of the Twelfth Army was located. This is where the Twelfth Army was being dissolved.

Raymond: Could you tell me how the Soviet soldiers behaved towards you when you passed the line?

Moltchanoff: Yes. They demanded that I give them my documents. And I said, "Well, what do I have? I just escaped from the German prisoner-of-war camp." And they said, "Okay, go on, and go see our commander."

Raymond: Because you were a former officer, did they attempt to molest you in any way?

Moltchanoff: No, not at all. Considering the fact that I ran away from the Germans, they even treated me nicely. And the regimental commander even gave me not only a pass but also some money to get to Yaroslavl and told me that there, in Yaroslavl, I would be paid for the time that I had been in the prisoner-of-war camp.

When I arrived in Yaroslavl, nobody bothered me either. Soldiers sometimes made trouble in the city, but nobody bothered me, especially since I never wore epaulettes. After they ordered them removed I didn't ever put them on again. I had taken my epaulettes off after the Bolsheviks came to power and issued an order to take them off. I just took them off. I didn't make anybody take them off for me.

Raymond: Were you preparing to run away to the south at that time?

Moltchanoff: No, never. I never wanted to go to the south. I always planned to go to Siberia.

Raymond: Before you became a prisoner-of-war but after the Bolsheviks came--during this period--how did you feel about the Revolution and about the future? And did you expect to take an active part in the struggle against the Bolsheviks?

Moltchanoff: I had very little time to think. I was so busy trying to



Moltchanoff: save the equipment and transport it back to the rear. Furthermore, you know, there were no officers' organizations on the front at that time, and I would say that about fifty per cent of the new young lieutenants who had been sent to the front lines towards the end of the war were very revolutionary so that most of the younger officers were not apt to form any anti-Bolshevik officers' organizations.

I, for one, did not recognize the provisional government anyway, so that the Bolshevik Revolution did not affect me all that much at first. In fact, when the Kerensky government had ordered a pledge of allegiance to be given to it by all the officers, I made sure that I was sent on an inspection trip to various areas so that I would not have to give Kerensky my pledge of allegiance. When I returned, I told the commander of the Army Corps that I never made a pledge of allegiance to Kerensky. And so I never really had to do it.

Raymond: Considering the fact that you were so openly a monarchist, did not any of the Bolshevik soldiers try to kill you?

Moltchanoff: No, no. You see, many of the officers acted in a brutal fashion themselves, so in many ways maybe the officers were to a certain extent at fault. I know such instances when a company commander would take everything he wanted from the soldiers' kitchen, would take the best parts of the meat and would never pay for it, and the soldiers kept quiet. And then, even in one engineering battalion, they told the commander, "We're going to kill you for this."

Whenever I took anything, I always ordered that I would get no more of a portion than just any other soldier, and I would always pay for it. I never stole from my company or took any extra privileges, and that is why I think some officers had trouble. In fact, even the general used to come to my company and ask to eat from the common pot, because we always ate so well.

Raymond: Then, if I understand you correctly, the relationship of the soldiers to the officers after the Revolution was often influenced by the fact that before the Revolution many of the officers had behaved poorly towards the soldiers.

Moltchanoff: Yes. It was due to the fact that before some of the officers had acted badly towards their soldiers. But those officers that were good were not touched at all. For instance, I never was bothered. We never had such things as our epaulettes cut off with a sword or anything like that. But I was always very



Moltchanoff: frank with them. I always told them that I was not a revolutionary and could not be a revolutionary and that I would leave and go away from their army, that the Red Army was not for me and that I was leaving. My career as a military man was over.

Raymond: There were many Russian officers who were ordered by Trotsky to join the Red Army. Was this during your time?

Moltchanoff: Oh yes. This occurred even before I was captured by the Germans. I know well that many of these officers voluntarily went to Trotsky. For instance, there was such a colonel by the name of Shaposhnikoff, who later became a famous Soviet military commander. They made careers for themselves.

Raymond: Did you want to do this?

Moltchanoff: Well, maybe I am wrong in many respects, but I considered General Kornilov to be a traitor even though before the war I spent a lot of time with him in maneuvers in Siberia. But I think that General Kornilov was a traitor because he stood with a Red banner talking incendiary speeches in Petrograd. And even worse, when he came up to the Emperor after the Emperor had abdicated and said, "Colonel Romanoff, you must consider yourself as arrested." Couldn't they find some other scoundrel to say this to the Emperor?

And so when other officers talked to me in Riga about making a career in the Red Army, they told me that the Reds were taking young officers and incorporating them into their new Red Army. I told them, "You go ahead and go with these scoundrels. I will not go."

As soon as I came back from the German captivity, the commander of the regiment where I was stationed tried to get me to join the Red Army. But I answered that I couldn't do this.

Raymond: Why didn't you want to join the Red Army?

Moltchanoff: Because I had contempt for all this. How could I not have contempt for an army where the commanders were doing all kinds of political things? And I was not interested in politics at all. And their commanders and commissars knew nothing about military affairs. I considered myself as a purely military man who never interfered in politics.

Raymond: Anyway, you ended up in Yaroslavl?





Moltchanoff: Yes. I got there and I was completely free. I received my back salary, several thousands in Kerensky money, and then I decided to go to Kamishlov. This was across the Ural Mountains, where the Sixth Siberian Army Corps headquarters was liquidating its affairs. I was transferred there. I had not been discharged yet, but considering the fact that I had run away from the Germans, they sent me there and paid me until I left the area. From this army headquarters, I was given documents to return to my home in Elabuga by a very friendly Latvian who was a Communist but was responsible for discharging officers. He even gave me two bottles of vodka.

Raymond: Why did you go to Elabuga?

Moltchanoff: That is where my mother was living. Only for that reason. Elabuga is in the Viatskaia province. My brother was there too. He was a village district judge. When I got there I reported to the revolutionary military council of the area. In this council, they were all ex-officers, and they told me that I should hide because "they are going to take you to be a military engineer of the right flank of the Fifth Red Army." So I hid out in various places in villages nearby.

I knew that the Red Army was very short of specialists and they were taking them forcefully into the Red Army. And of course I didn't want to serve. This was easy for me, because all I had to say was, "I am the brother of Alexander Mikhailovich," and the local people would hide me--especially the Tartars who lived in that area and who loved my brother very much. All this was in April of 1918, before the beginning of the Civil War.

Later, I went from Kamishlov on board a ship on the river Kama just after the ice broke. I was in one of the first class cabins. The second class cabins were occupied by peasants, and the third classes were taken up by the Red Army troops who were being transferred. Among the passengers there was an anarchist with a black beard and black eyes who was agitating the people telling them not to listen to or obey the Bolsheviks.

But when the Red Army soldiers came up from the third class to the first class, this anarchist shouted at the captain to send them back to their quarters because he had paid his money and they hadn't. To me this anarchist was saying that Russia could be saved only if the Bolsheviks were overthrown and that everything that existed in Russia now had to be destroyed and built up from the bottom up.



Raymond: What month was this, and why were you traveling aboard this ship?

Moltchanoff: This was in April of 1918, and I was trying to get from Kamislov to Elabuga. There were no roads available at that time, because there were no railroads in Elabuga. The closest one was, oh, about sixty versts north of Elabuga. There were all kinds of disturbances in the countryside there, and it was not advisable to travel by horse.

The bands that roamed in the back country were not Red bands but just brigands. Some of them were peasants, and some of them were discharged soldiers, and even the Red commanders couldn't control them. So the only way I could travel was by riverboat. I started from Kamislov and I went to Elabuga. These bands killed all the members of the intelligentsia and all the officers that they could get hold of.

When I arrived in Elabuga, it turned out that all the intelligentsia had been destroyed. The Red Guard, which was not part of the regular Red Army formations, came and killed the priest because both of his sons had been officers. They killed all his family and threw them into the river under the ice. And they also got hold of all the very rich people. The Stakheiev family was a very wealthy millionaire family in Elabuga. They were all killed. They were wheat merchants and dominated the whole town before the Revolution. They had built the town cathedral and had ordered that it be the highest cathedral in all of Russia. And they also insisted that there be a very high ranking priest in their cathedral as well as a magnificent choir. They paid extra money for making sure that their church and their choir would be the best in the land.

Elabuga was a very rich town. There were many rich people there. But everything revolved around the Stakheiev family. This was not a landlord town but a typically merchant town.

By the way, I had sent all of my military decorations from the front to my mother in Elabuga. She was horrified at this because she was afraid that somebody would discover them and know that her son was an officer. But she had them hidden under the floor boards of the house, and nobody discovered them.

When I returned to Elabuga I had already on me a discharge from the revolutionary commission of Kamyslov allowing me to return to Elabuga where I got my education. This revolutionary



Moltchanoff: committee of the Soviets was manned, as I said before, by officers who were forced to serve on this committee. Later on, these officers worked for me in the White Army.

They had advised me to go to the doctor to certify that I was physically disabled, because indeed my legs were in very bad shape. And the doctor, who was a good man, advised me that the head of the revolutionary committee in Elabuga was a Bolshevik and that despite my medical certificates I would be forcibly drafted by the Red Army and sent to the front where the Fifth Red Army was already fighting on the Kama against the insurrection on the Volga, which had started at this time.



## V THE WHITE MOVEMENT

Moltchanoff: In May or June of 1918 an anti-Bolshevik uprising had taken place in Samara and the city of Kazan had fallen to the Whites with the help of the Czech troops. Anyway, I decided to go to stay with my brother about twenty-five versts away from Elabuga and hid out there. The Reds, however, knew that I had gone to stay with my brother. But they didn't succeed in finding me because whenever a voluntary troop was sent by them to gather produce in that area and to look for me, I would always leave and go to stay with some Tartar acquaintances of my brother. All I had to tell them was that my brother had sent me and that I was hiding from the Bolsheviks and they would immediately hide me from any searchers. All these Tartars were very much anti-Bolshevik in inclination, and I kept this in mind for later on.

Finally, as the White movement spread from Kazan and reached Elabuga, there was an overthrow of the local Red government. However, the people who came to power did not let the arrested officers--there were some 260 of them sitting in the city jail--go free. The head of the new government was afraid of these officers because he didn't know whether the young lieutenants who were under arrest and among whom there were no regular Army officers might or might not be secret Reds. The Elabuga intelligentsia who knew me demanded that the new government in Elabuga call me because they trusted me. They knew that I had finished realschule there and was from the town.

Raymond: Had you ever visited Elabuga after you left high school?

Moltchanoff: Yes. Only once, for one day on a military leave, before the





Moltchanoff: war. Anyway, it was obvious to me that all the peasantry was against the Reds. And even the Red-inclined soldiers who had deserted from the Army were completely non-Bolshevik. They had run away from the Army because they had become tired of fighting, but they didn't want to support the Reds. This was quite understandable to me, because I knew well that the soldiers didn't know anything about politics, and this was one of the faults of the officer corps of the Tsar's Army, because we were not informed about politics and we didn't know what was happening in God's world. I never tried to convince these soldiers that they should fight against the Bolsheviks, I felt that this would happen all by itself.

#### Moltchanoff's First White Command

Moltchanoff: One night at about eleven o'clock while I was sleeping, I was awakened and told that the local village was having a gathering and had invited me and my brother to this very important meeting that they were having. So we arrived there, and this village meeting informed us that they had decided to stand up against the Bolsheviks and that they wanted our help. This was in July of 1918.

And I asked them, "What means do you have in terms of armaments?" They started adding things up. There were quite a few soldiers from the front lines, but they didn't have much ammunition. They had two rifles, a few swords, and nothing else. However, they decided that they wanted to fight, and they decided to organize a fighting group and nominated me as commander. They had a hundred volunteers for the infantry and twenty for the cavalry for reconnaissance. And I decided to use young twelve year old boys as messengers. They knew everything and went everywhere, and they were very eager to help. This was my reconnaissance division. And I appointed a regular Army sergeant to be in charge of that.

Little by little the civilian side of things came under my brother's control, although nominally it was under control of the village council. Instead of calling it the village soviet, we called it the village administration. The members of this group were not really Bolsheviks, and they wanted to continue working for their settlement.

Raymond: Was this before or after the overthrow of the Reds in Elabuga?



Moltchanoff: This was right after the overthrow, and I didn't really want to return to Elabuga. So I stayed there with my brother. Anyway, the people en masse were against Bolshevism. They wanted order. I wouldn't say that they were all monarchists--not at all. But they all wanted order. "We don't need any socialists," they would say. "If there is no Emperor, then we must put somebody whom we can trust in power." But it was well known that this was the beginning of a certain kind of party, not for the restoration of the Emperor. After all, the Emperor was still alive; we knew where he was. This was the mood of the people, at least in the Viatskaia province and in part of the Kazan province. I don't know anything about the adjoining Samara province.

In any case, I had to meet with some of these Socialist-Revolutionaries. My brother asked me to meet one of them. His trade was shoemaker. I met with him and we had a nice talk. I saw that this was a Russian man who loved his fatherland and wished the best to her. He was no socialist. Since there was no Tsar, he realized that there was a need for a state and for a government that would work for the people rather than rob from the people.

We decided that our first fight with the Reds would be when the Reds would come from Ufa. They were moving from Ufa northward to Perm, because it was already kind of hot for them in Ufa because the anti-Bolshevik Second Ufimski Army Corps had already been organized there. Anyway, the Whites started moving, and Ufa became one of the centers of the White insurrection against the Reds. From there Marshal Blukher, one of the Red commanders--of course at that time he was no marshal--had to run away.

By the way, I really studied this whole area, so that I knew it as well as I know my five fingers. I was informed that there were a lot of Bolsheviks around. As soon as there was a White uprising, the people got hold of these Bolsheviks and liquidated them. This couldn't be stopped. This was done by the peasants themselves. They killed them.

Raymond: Were there many killed?

Moltchanoff: I was told about twenty, or I suspect probably a little more than that, but we couldn't even keep track of this. Anyway, I was told that two Red companies were advancing upon me. Actually they were running away from Ufa and they had crossed the Kama and were moving toward our village. Ahead of them the commissar of the group with a woman raced in a coach. We



Moltchanoff: got hold of the money and put his woman into jail but had the commissar shot. That night the guard tried to rape her, but when I found this out I ordered that the sentry be shot and that if he were not shot I would quit my command of this group and go back to Elabuga.

My brother was then the head of the civil administration as I was head of the military administration. They paid us very well. I received forty rubles a day, officers received twenty, and soldiers ten. Besides this, the merchants and the peasants of the area also fed us very well. We were well equipped with horses and carriages, so that even when we had to go to the front line outside of the village we didn't have to walk, but everybody drove in these fancy carriages.

As soon as the church bells rang alarm, everybody would jump out of their houses, get hold of whatever weapons they had-- hunting weapons, pitchforks, we finally found six rifles and some small arms--and would rush on horses to the front lines.

These two Red companies continued to advance towards us. I was informed by my reconnaissance people that they never entered villages but bypassed them. I then decided that they would stop in a near-by ravine which was very favorable for camping because it was a good defensive position from a military point of view. It was approximately a mile in length.

This was in the foothills of the Ural Mountains, so there were a few uneven spots. I ordered the attack against the Reds to take place at dawn. I wanted to attack during the night, but nobody else was willing, because they were afraid that they would shoot at each other. So we agreed to do it early in the morning. I took the six men with rifles and had them guard the exit of the ravine to the north. The cavalry was to come in from the east in order to create a panic. And from the southwest I had the 150 men, the bulk of my forces, advance with pitchforks and hand grenades.

Everything happened as I had anticipated. We captured some 75 rifles from the Reds, all of whom were killed or captured. Only the commander and his assistant ran away on good horses. The rest of them surrendered. And we even got a Lewis sub-machine gun.

Raymond: What did you do with the prisoners?

Moltchanoff: The ones we took we immediately let loose. I told them, "Go



Moltchanoff: home." I didn't try to keep them at all. The commanders took off before the fighting started; they didn't even wait for the fighting to be decided. They had beautiful horses, and this was very typical. They were often able to escape us--the commanders of the various detachments.

This was the Red Army, but I let the soldiers loose. I said, "If you want to fight, fight with me. And if you don't want to fight or want to fight against me, go home." Because I knew that these people would not fight for the Reds. They didn't want to fight; they just wanted to go home and stay there. I would say, "Put down your arms and get the hell wherever you want to go, and I'll even give you a certificate allowing you to leave." And I always knew that they wouldn't fight. And if they were drafted, they would shoot up into the air.

The Reds had very bad morale, and finally they were forced to have machine guns behind their attacking troops. Anyway, by this time I had a detachment of 500 men, and neighboring villages wanted us to start drafting them because they didn't want to be volunteers, being afraid of possible reprisals from the Reds. But they wanted us to draft them because they wanted to fight the Bolsheviks. However, I had no right to draft them, so I didn't.

In a little time, the government in Elabuga started becoming totally disorganized, and Lieutenant Serov, who was the head of the garrison, was unable to handle things. The officers were still sitting in jail. I finally arrived in Elabuga and took command of the garrison there. Kazan had by that time already been surrendered by the Whites and occupied by the Reds. This was in August of 1918. A lot of ships were going up the river past Elabuga with refugees. There was nothing left in Elabuga. As far as the Czechs were concerned, they were of no use. They came there once, pushed people around, stole things, and then requisitioned transport to take this booty away.

I started organizing a military command in Elabuga, and everything was going very well. I liberated all the former officers from prison, giving them an option. Those who wanted to work with me could join my ranks; those who didn't I would send to the rear echelon. Only eight officers from Siberia asked to be sent back. The rest stayed with me to fight.

I asked each one of these officers personally about themselves. I knew that some of them were fakes and had never





Moltchanoff: been officers. But after interrogating them I was able to discover those who were fakes and told them to go away. The rest I allowed to join my troops. As far as those men who were faking were concerned, I offered them the choice of either becoming regular soldiers or of going away. Most of them just disappeared.

As soon as I took control of the Elabuga garrison, the public-spirited citizens there began to insist that I punish those who had been Red spies and agents in Elabuga, those who had betrayed the intelligentsia and officers to the Reds. And especially there was one young lady, the granddaughter of Kibardin, the owner of a well-known bookstore and stationary store. She had betrayed her father and her grandfather to the Reds.

I decided that I was not going to take the matter into my own hands, but rather I organized a military court from those lieutenants who had finished a legal education, and I set them the task of being a field court. This court condemned four men to be shot--each one of whom had caused the deaths of at least fifty people. But this woman, the Kibardin woman, was condemned to death by hanging in a public square--upside-down, hanging by her legs. I told them that I would not allow this under any circumstances, that I would go along with them shooting her, but that was it.

I went to see the condemned and realized that these were really desperate characters. The woman, once she saw me, refused to answer any questions. When I told her that I could ease her punishment, she said, "I spit on your mercy."

Anyway, she had betrayed a lot of people, and even her grandfather, who had been a very kind man and had treated us high school kids very kindly by lending us money when we needed to buy books. This granddaughter was nothing but a sadist, trying to hurt people. She would accuse people of being monarchists, claiming that they were exploiters and wicked people.

To make a long story short, all these people were shot. I could not have stopped this, because if I had there would have been an uprising in the city. There was that much hatred against these people. Everybody was insisting that they be killed.

As far as military things were concerned, things became worse and worse because I had under my command a lot of men who had



Moltchanoff: refused to serve with the Red Army, whom I liberated from jail. I had asked them to work for me and fight with me, and some of them did join. In fact, this is how I formed the Elabuga regiment.

However, these men often refused to take orders from my officers, on all kinds of pretexts including the fact that they didn't have proper shoes and things like that. I talked to them, and I said, "You can go any place you want to, and you can change your opinion, but as long as you stay in my command you have to obey my orders." And I promised them that I would give equipment to all of them as soon as I was able to get shoes but that it took time.

Raymond: Who paid you your salary?

Moltchanoff: The peasants and the merchants were giving us a great deal of money, because they wanted to keep us there to defend them against the Reds. Peasants, for instance, brought us an enormous amount of produce. They would bring it to the central city square--meats, vegetables, and even money. In fact, they even gave me two hundred head of cattle, which I lost later on because I was unable to take them across the river.

Raymond: Who were you subordinate to at that time?

Moltchanoff: To nobody. I was trying to reach other groups, but I couldn't reach even Ufa, so I was totally independent. Finally after a great deal of effort I was able to establish contact with some of the civil authorities in Ufa. I heard from somebody who had run away from Kazan that there was a government existing in Samara called Kamuch, and I also heard that there was some kind of a government in Ufa. I couldn't get in touch with them by telephone because miles of line had been torn up, probably by Red partisans.

Finally, I was able to reach Samara via Chistopol, and when the Samara White military authorities found out that there was a detachment commanded by a Moltchanoff on their right flank they asked me who I was. This was in August, 1918. I informed Samara that I was a lieutenant colonel. But the government of Samara said, "Militarily do what you need to, but we forbid you to mobilize even a single soldier." And I could have at that time raised as many as 30,000 soldiers who, while they were afraid to volunteer, would have been happy enough to fight the Bolsheviks had I drafted them.

Anyway, I got more than 7,000 volunteers. However I had no



Moltchanoff: guns to give them, though I had a lot of food and a lot of bread. Finally I was able to make contact with the Izhevsk factory, where there was no bread but where they had many guns, and we made an exchange.

During this time, the river flotilla was retreating from Kazan on the river Kama. This flotilla was commanded by a captain of the second rank, Feodosiev. It was a rather large flotilla, but of course there weren't any very excellent ships. Most of them were converted tugboats with about two light guns on them. In any case, Feodosiev asked me to subordinate myself to him, but I replied, "In which way will you help me?" And he said, "Well, in no way at all. But give me alcohol." This man was an alcoholic and had been used to drinking liquor. But since there were no liquors, he would dump various berries into alcohol and drink that way. He was a drunk.

Past Elabuga he went on to Sarapul, which was to the northeast of Elabuga and left an order that I should be subordinate to him. I decided that I would go to Sarapul on the Kama, which took me approximately one day there and one day back. In this period that we've been talking about, there were hardly any people to fight with. Most of the people did not from the very beginning believe in--let us say it bluntly--counter-revolution.

When this Captain Feodosiev passed through Elabuga and refused to meet me, one of the sailors who was serving under him and who got off the ship in Elabuga told me, "You can take this ship, Orel, and go see the captain, and then the Orel will be coming back to Elabuga because it's going up to get some supplies and some parts for cannons." I went to Sarapul. We went up the river with some fighting, some shooting, because on the right and on the left there were bands. On the left bank there were a lot of mountains, and they were shooting there. Shishkin wrote about that and drew some pictures of it in his book called Pine Forests. But from the right side we were being shot at with machine guns. But we finally got to Sarapul successfully.

I looked for the chief of staff of the captain, who was aboard his flag ship. The chief of staff was Azovin, who was an infantry officer. Later on he became a colonel. He asked me, "Do you have a day or two to wait? The captain is drunk, and we'll have to wait until he sobers up. He refuses to recognize any authority, any organizations except monarchist ones. No government exists for him now. He's just retreating



Moltchanoff: to save his fleet but refuses to subordinate himself to anybody because he's a monarchist."

I said, "Well, what is there to do about this? He was made captain by Admiral Stark, and we don't know how to find the admiral." I think he was in Ufa at that time. You see, this was the situation. Somehow this man became a leader, and who knows why, because there were some excellent young marine officers in his flotilla. This man didn't fight at all. All he did was retreat and retreat from Kazan to Ufa, hoping that the infantry would do something. But Feodosiev himself didn't want to do anything. He took one of my companies of officers, claiming that he was going to set up an impregnable fortress, as he called it "a verdun" at the confluence between the Belaia and the Kama Rivers. I think he probably slept through it when he passed that spot. The trouble was the flotilla couldn't help me. My friend said, "Don't count on anything. Just hope that maybe Stark or somebody will replace him."

On the other hand, there were some excellent young officers. For instance, the commander of the ship Orel was a real officer. He had for sailors high school students and he taught them very fast and very effectively and made good sailors out of them. And there were among the officers of the flotilla senior lieutenants who could have very easily commanded the flotilla. For instance, there was a barge with a motor that pulled a forty-two caliber cannon which could even sink river-going gunboats. This cannon was very powerful and very effective. The name of the barge was "Czechoslovak," for some reason or other.

Anyway, this useless captain Feodosiev couldn't use his flotilla for anything good. Finally I made an agreement with him that when I was forced to evacuate Elabuga then he would help me cross the Kama River. I planned to cross about twenty versts north in a spot called Verkhne Chelny. Anyway, this was the agreement I had with Feodosiev, because I wanted to take across with me those two hundred head of cattle that the peasants had given my troops.

I stayed in Elabuga for a while longer. By the way, there were a lot of ships that were passing Elabuga. Typically they'd be occupied by a few officers and a few Czech soldiers. When I demanded that the Czechs make this shipping available to me too, the replied to me, "No, this is under our command." And I said, "All right. If you don't immediately make this





Moltchanoff: ship available to its rightful owners, the Russians, I will shoot at you." I had machine guns right on the harbor of the river, and I was quite easily able to stop them. You see, these Czechs, after they stopped fighting on the Samara front--some of them just took off by themselves all over the place and started to rob the population. My talk with them was very short. I would order that they be shot if they molested Russians, and I would talk about nothing else. Later on, these people tried to complain against me to Ufa, and I reported, "Okay, just let them bother me and I will take care of them. And I will judge them for their crimes in Russia."

Many people say that Czechs have done a lot of things. One can almost imagine that Czechs conquered Russia and then were taking out of Russia sewing machines, automobiles? What did that mean, that they conquered us or something?

Raymond: I could never understand this particular period of the Civil War. How could it happen that the Czechs all of a sudden took control of all the railroads in Siberia, of all the trains?

Moltchanoff: Well, you see, we ought to discuss this whole question later. This was a disgusting situation. They were no heroes, but they had some very fine men. And I'll tell you about this later. In any case, I was unable to reach Admiral Stark, and Feodosiev still remained in hiding. All that I had to do I was able to accomplish through Azovin's help. He was a very fine man who was an excellent chap and wanted to fight for his motherland.

Suddenly a big ship arrived at Elabuga, and I was told that this ship was filled with Russian officers and that a Lieutenant Colonel Lukashevich, who had been commander of a reserve regiment in Elabuga during the war, was there. I decided that I would go out and see no matter what the protocol was. So I went over to the ship, which, incidentally, could never have left without my permission--and all the more so because I had one armed ship that stood a distance out of the harbor, and therefore I controlled all the harbor.

Raymond: That means that you had complete control in Elabuga.

Moltchanoff: Oh, yes. I had absolute control over all of the life in Elabuga at that time. In fact, I received instructions from Ufa saying, "Act by yourself and do what you need to do; we are too far away, and we cannot give you any effective



Moltchanoff: leadership." Then after I crossed the Kama, then there was a 250 verst distance between me and the nearest White armed unit led by Lieutenant Colonel Kappel.

There were many officers aboard the ship, even quite a few generals. I asked the Lieutenant Colonel, "On what basis did you give me an order to come to see you?" And he said, "Well, I want to give you instructions about how to defend Elabuga." And I said, "No. I'm very glad if you stay here, and I will be glad to subordinate myself to you." And he said, "No. I'm leaving. I don't want to fight here. I want to go to Siberia with the rest of these officers." I then told him that we were fighting here not for any one particular government but for Russia." He replied, "Well, that's what it seems to you, but that's not the way I feel about it." And I said, "Well, in that case, you have no authority here; and now I'm giving you orders, and the first order I'm issuing to you is that you line up all your officers on board the deck of the ship. I want to talk to them."

Speaking to the officers on deck, I said, "You gentlemen have heard that I need officers with staff experience and cadre experience, and there are so many of you here. This ship of yours is covered by machine gunners under my command." And I asked them if they would want to join me. Not a single one did. They all decided to go on. And so I ordered all of the general officers and the other officers into the first and second class cabins, and I stuffed the third classes with a large number of the civilians who wanted to go to Siberia and run away from the Reds. You know, all these ships that left Elabuga empty--I filled them up with manufactured goods and with a lot of the people that wanted to leave. There was no need to leave all this material for the Reds. So we took it and evacuated it to Siberia. I took a lot of wheat and sent it up on the ships--in fact, all of the ships were loaded when they passed Elabuga.

Finally I got in contact with Ufa, and heard that they were forming the Second Ufa Army Corps there. I asked Ufa, "To whom do I subordinate myself?" And they said, "You're at such a distance that there is no way for you to subordinate yourself to us. Act by yourself. But it is our request that you retreat from Elabuga without hurrying and only when the flotilla starts retreating." This was approximately in the end of August of 1918, but it was already getting close to fall.



Raymond: How far was Ufa from Elabuga?

Moltchanoff: Well, it would have taken me about three days to reach it by boat. And, of course, one could reach it only by going on the Kama River and then the Balaia River, because nobody knew what was happening on the shore. There were bands of Czechs and bands of Bolsheviks, and mostly bands of bandits. It was a terrible situation for the population. And I do not blame the population for helping the Reds, because they were sort of forced to by all of the disorder that was happening around them.

When it became clear that evacuation was necessary, I wrote to Ufa in great detail as to how I was going to retreat and what means I needed to cross the Kama River, because I knew that I had to take the two hundred head of cattle across the river. I received a reply saying that all of this would be taken care of and a firm promise of help. When we retreated towards Chelnykh, the Red flotilla came up next to us. Our White flotilla had already started to pull away from Chelnykh, and they just left without leaving me a single boat.

In desperation, I ordered my soldiers to fire a cannon over the White boats that were retreating. Finally one of the little river tugboats came up, and it turned out that Captain Feodosiev was again drunk, but he however managed to order the big tugboat "Czechoslovak" to shoot its cannon and chase off the Red flotilla temporarily. Finally we were able to get enough White boats to come up so as to evacuate all the soldiers. However, we were not able to move out the two hundred head of cattle because we just didn't have enough means of crossing the river, and this was, of course, the captain's fault, because he was so much in a hurry to evacuate and retreat before the Red flotilla.

Very soon thereafter I received an order from Ufa which said, "Retreat from Chelnykh to Menzilinsk to Birsik." Birsik was on the Belaja River. And they even said that the speed of retreat should depend on how fast Lieutenant Colonel Cappel retreated. "Don't accept any heavy battles because you're way ahead of Cappel at this point."

I want to tell you an interesting situation that happened there. I had decided not to stay in Chelnykh itself but to move my army, and at this point it was about 7,000 men strong, to about fifteen versts away where there was an



Molitchanoff: excellent defensive position and where my rear would be safe from the various marauding bands that were infesting that area. These were not Red army; they were just bands of brigands and the Czechs, who were robbing the people. Whenever I caught any of them I shot them without even any trial. Anyway, I decided to leave a cannon in Chelnykh so as to prevent the Red gunboats from passing. This cannon was commanded by a Cossack Lieutenant called Sapozhnikov, and was guarded by about forty people. All of a sudden I heard a shot, and who knows where that shot went, but all of the people who were supposed to be guarding the cannon took off at the moment they saw a small Red river gunboat that was coming towards them.

At the same time I saw going full steam ahead the best ship in that area, the "Nezhin." On this ship the Emperor traveled once upon a time when he was visiting this area. Everybody in Siberia near the Urals knew this ship. This was the pride and joy of the area. This was the strongest and the biggest ship on the Volga. Anyway, this ship touched the harbor, and all of a sudden the machine guns let loose at this ship's captain's bridge. It was, of course, controlled by the Reds, and it immediately started retreating backwards along with the current, which is very risky and against all rules, but they really disappeared as fast as possible from our machine gun fire.

I had to guess where the Reds would get off their ships. I thought that they would not land near Chelnykh because they would just be sitting on a beachhead with their backs to the river and this would be too dangerous for them. Such a position would be impossible to defend. I felt sure that their infantry would go where there were more populated areas. This was exactly the corner where the Belaita River enters the Kama River, and it was there that I thought they would land because there were a lot of small settled places there that had not been robbed yet and which would provide them with a lot of supplies.

So anyway, we moved about twelve or fifteen versts away from Chelnykh towards Menzilin'sk, and towards this corner, the corner of confluence of the Belaita and the Kama River, I sent a battalion to repel any of the Reds that might come up from the south and try to land. Everything to the south was already in Red hands, and even to the north except for Izhevsk and Votkinsk, which were some miles north on the Kama River. While this was happening, I was retreating towards Menzilin'sk in a northeastern direction. I was not afraid of any attack from the west, since Cappel was there and only minor





Moltchanoff: Red bands were there.

But, I was afraid of attack from the north, that is, from Reds who might get off the Kama River. Right at this time I was reinforced by the 13th Ufa Battalion that came up to meet me. It was commanded by a Captain Modestov. I sent him right away to the corner where a battalion commanded by Koloshov was also stationed. My orders were, "Don't get involved in a major battle; avoid being shot by the Red flotilla, but make it difficult for the Reds to advance. Just push them back into the river." This he did twice and was getting ready to do the third time, but I ordered him to retreat because it became obvious that all our ships had already passed around the corner. In fact, they had already passed the little village of Devtuly, and the Red flotilla had advanced to that point, so that I would be threatened from the east as well as from the north. So I had to attack the village of Devtuly and occupy it because this was my way of crossing the Belaia River to Birsik. This battalion of Modestov that came to me from Ufa had one cannon and twelve machine guns, which was a tremendous help for me--actually, two cannons. So it turned out that I had almost a whole battery.

During this whole period I was afraid mostly for my flanks and rear. "As soon as you evacuate definitely," I was told, "Menzilinsk would be indefensible." You see, I had to fight from all sides. This was the nature of fighting during the Civil War.

Raymond: You did not put up a fight to guard Elabuga. Why?

Moltchanoff: Well, because all the important battles were to the north of this area, where the factories of Votkinsk and Izhevsk were. The Reds weren't attacking Elabuga. They were bypassing it. They were trying to get to Izhevsk, and once they had their Red flotilla traveling on the Kama they could occupy Elabuga with a very small holding force.

The Red detachments committed a great many atrocities in Elabuga. I heard about this from a priest who had come from a little town called Mamadysh at the confluence of the Viatka and the Kama Rivers and who had passed through Elabuga on his way to Birsik just a little while before. He said that there the Reds, when they found out that somebody was with Moltchanoff, committed atrocities.

Anyway, when I heard that Izhevsk and Votkinsk were occupied



Moltchanoff: and that the Reds had built a temporary bridge across the Kama near there and were advancing towards Ufa, I realized that I was too far away from the main bulk of the White armies and that I was being attacked not only from the north but also from the east.

Anyway, we kept retreating and retreating. I would receive orders from Ufa, such instructions as "Act as you please." From all this, I formed the opinion that we were completely unnecessary to the people in Ufa and that we were superfluous in their view. For them Moltchanoff was like a black spot on a white background. For instance, I heard that in Ufa they referred to my armed detachment as Moltchanoff's detachment, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Moltchanoff. I don't know why they called it a Moltchanoff detachment. Myself, I called it the Pre-Kama detachment, so as not to hurt anybody.

General Lieutenant Lupov who was Chief of Staff of the corps at Ufa gave me no orders whatsoever. I was for them something unnecessary. They told me to fight and "while you, Moltchanoff, are fighting, we are going to organize a real army." I got the impression that we had to die to the last man while they were forming elaborate armies. Maybe this was the correct thing, especially if they were able to organize something through volunteers, but they succeeded in no such thing.

Raymond: What about the Izhevsk and Votkinsky men?

Moltchanoff: These men were all workers and volunteers who were commanded by the chief army headquarters. They had gone over to the White side quite a while before and constituted the Izhevsk brigade. But at that time I didn't know much about them. Most of them were workers and socialist revolutionaries, and my only previous contact with them had been during the time when I exchanged bread from Elabuga for their rifles. But this exchange didn't last long because they ran out of guns themselves. The Izhevsk factory had been a government factory which manufactured small arms.

During the fall of 1918 there was really no army coordination, and everything was pretty chaotic. Finally I received the whole of the 13th Regiment under the command of Captain Karpov, a very rare and exceptional officer. He was a self-educated man. When I finally received the command of two regiments and a cavalry division as well as of an artillery brigade, I organized a field hospital and it gradually became



Moltchanoff: a very large army hospital. I gathered a lot of medicine and got hold of many doctors who really wanted to help in the struggle. I also got a lot of nurses who were almost all volunteers. They didn't have much experience, but they really wanted to help us. This hospital even had doctors who were teaching our nurses regular courses. And how the peasants helped us to gather all the medicines and supplies! It was really remarkable. So it turned out that I had a huge baggage train following me when I retreated, but I had good organization and coordination. At this point Ufa started calling me a commander of a detachment rather than a lieutenant colonel. At the same time I think that Ufa had a certain amount of respect for me.

Raymond: How many soldiers did you have under your command during that period?

Moltchanoff: More than seven and a half thousand. It was a large detachment. If they had given us guns and if they had allowed us to go, reorganize, and gather more volunteers, I could have raised as many as fifteen thousand. And if we had started mobilizing, then we could have gotten more than 35,000.

Finally I was told by Ufa to issue a mobilization order in a certain small district populated by Bashkirs. Of course, it was a very small mobilization of just a few classes, but still none of these people understood Russian, and they not only disappeared on the first battle but also took away our very rare rifles. I went to inspect the mobilization points. There I bumped into a Bashkir who had been the orderly for our battalion doctor, and he had always liked me very much. He told me, "Don't take these men. I will get you some really fine volunteers." This is what I did, and I ordered all of the people who were mobilized to go back home. Shortly I got from this orderly, who was a very important man in his village, some volunteers whom I made into excellent reconnaissance men. They never betrayed us, and they gradually were killed off, but they stayed to the last man with my regiment.

How were we able to recruit people? Well, for instance, I had a marvelous priest who was a tremendous orator. He spoke so well, explaining the greatness of Russia, how she needed to be helped, how the Bolsheviks were destroying her, that he was able to get many volunteers on the basis of his inspiring oratory. Or, for instance, when he was burying some dead soldiers, he would give a speech at the graveside. And he would speak so well that always a few volunteers would come and join immediately after. Finally he got sick, and we had to send him to the rear, and I lost track of him.



Raymond: At this time were you receiving any supplies from Ufa?

Moltchanoff: No. We got nothing from them because they had nothing themselves. We were able to get supplied from the Reds, from whom we captured guns and other military equipment. Our soldiers fought very, very well.

Raymond: Why did you keep retreating?

Moltchanoff: Well, it is because of the fact that the whole front must be seen as a unit which retreats in order not to let single units get isolated and cut off from the main body. We were retreating towards Birsik across the Belaia River, gradually, so as not to be cut off. And I was being attacked especially from the north. I finally established a defense position seven versts from Birsik on the other side of the river.

Finally General Lupov was replaced by General Vetsakhovsky and suddenly everything changed. He became interested in my activities. This was already during the winter, around November or December, 1918. At that time I was stationed on the west bank of the Belaia River, which flows north and south. The river was frozen, and this was right across the street from Birsik. In Birsik itself there was a staff of an army corps, but they did not have any control over their corps, because it was scattered across the whole countryside. We were lodged in a fine old house of some landlord, and in front of it there were a few small villages where the soldiers were located and where their trenches were. By this time I was really well known in the whole of Birsik.

Raymond: Where did you receive money from at that time?

Moltchanoff: At that time, when I finally got to Birsik, I started receiving salaries from Ufa from the army corps. There was also a staff of a division in Birsik. One of the regiments was with me, the 13th Regiment which I told you about. The rest of the regiments were away somewhere to the rear being formed up. And the strange thing was that not once did any of the officers from these two commands come across the Belaia River to inspect us or my detachment. It seems like they didn't care at all about me. All they expected from me was to fight, but they gave us no help.

All of a sudden I was called to the telephone from Ufa by General Vaytsekovsky, who informed me that he was now my commander. I spoke to him for what must have been at least an hour and a half by direct line telephone and told him





Moltchanoff: everything. He told me, "Don't be bashful. Call me night or day when you need to talk to me." I felt all of a sudden that there was firm control above me, and he gave me the whole orientation of what to do. He told me that my main task was not to get stuck in any one place for any length of time but to cover the flank of General Kappel. Kappel was at that time retreating towards Ufa from Samara\* and was in danger of being cut off. I finally felt that somebody would be able to hold command over all of us. He told me, "Colonel, stay in Birsk even after all of the staffs leave, and hold it." This was in December of 1918. He told me, "Hold, but no longer than three days, and then start retreating across the mountains, across the Ural Mountains towards Dubany and hold there as long as you can. You are miles ahead of the rest of the front, and you must gradually retreat towards us. Not to Ufa, but to the east across the Ural Mountains." I did this, and finally I came up to where I was ordered, and my front now faced to the west and to the north. We crossed the Ural Mountains in the winter.

I held Birsk for about a week because I had to organize the retreat of all my rear echelon convoy. It was rather easy to hold the Reds even though they attacked all the time because we could hold the high bank of the river, which was now frozen. And we had fine artillery that was really doing well. The Red artillery was also good, but they kept shelling Birsk rather than our positions. Birsk, by the way, was a big town with nice buildings. Their artillery couldn't harm us because we had dug our trenches before winter set in, and they were very solid.

Finally, after I retreated, I discovered that Ufa had already been abandoned, and I succeeded in covering all the passes which were negotiable during the winter and kept them closed. The Reds, of course, didn't want to cross the Urals at this time either--during the winter--but they, and we, began to use ski troops and dress them in white coveralls and even paint the rifles white. We both sent skirmishes of skiers against each other, especially each other's populated points. And you know how we were able to obtain white boots from the peasants? We traded them for alcohol, of which I had two big barrels that I had brought with me from Birsk. For alcohol we could get almost anything we wanted. Each barrel had forty buckets

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\*Now Kuybyshev.



Moltchanoff: worth of alcohol, and it was on this alcohol that I was able to dress my regiment.

### Command of the Izhevsk Division

Moltchanoff: Finally, when we reached our positions, I was informed that my detachment was going to be numbered the 4th Regiment of the Kama Division. I received a telegram and was informed that I was being transferred to command the Izhevsk Brigade. In this way my detachment stopped its existence and became integrated into part of the White armies facing the west.

I had heard, of course, that the Izhevsky were some kind of socialists, Bolsheviks, and would not listen to any orders, and I decided to refuse to accept this command, asking instead that I remain commander of my own Pre-Kama Regiment. I had organized this regiment from scratch and everybody knew me there. I sent a telegram to this effect, but I received an unpleasant reply from the Commander of the Army, Lieutenant-General Khanzhin, who demanded that I fulfill his orders and not get involved in discussions of them as was the Bolshevik practice. I had not said anything Bolshevik, but I had said that I was afraid that with my emotional character I would not be able to command these revolutionaries. I was ordered not to engage in any discussions, so I obeyed and went to take over this new command.

I took with me only one officer, a communications officer, because I had heard that the Izhevsk Brigade had no good communications people. I left Duvany and crossed the Urals. When I arrived at the location of the staff of the Second Army Corps, the commander of the corps was not there, but his assistant, or his chief-of-staff, Lieutenant Colonel Puchkov, told me as much as he could about this brigade. This brigade consisted of 7,500 bayonets, and a reserve battalion, a big quartermaster corps, and a cavalry, as well as an artillery group. He said that they were in excellent shape except that their supply situation was very, very poor, and he said that my first responsibility was to fix up their supply situation. This was in February of 1919, and I was told that at the beginning of March--the sixth of March, 1919--the White armies would launch a big offensive against the Reds and that I would have to be prepared to take an active part in this attack with my new command.

So I went to the location of the division, a small village



Moltchanoff: on the east side of the Ural Mountains. At this time, there were no White troops on the west side of the Urals except a few detachments that had formerly been under Lieutenant Colonel Cappel that held on to parts of the railroad. All the bulk of our forces were on the east side of the Ural Mountains.

When I first arrived, the Izhevsk troops did not want me. I sent them a telegram and informed them that I was coming, but there were no accommodations prepared for me, and I came to the village where their staff was located and there was nobody. The streets were empty. There was a big village there, and all the streets were totally empty. With me I took a man whom I selected to be my chief-of-staff, Captain Agapieyev. He had been with the General Staff and had been a former commander of two-engine airplanes. And I also brought a doctor, the chief medical officer of Sarapool for our brigade doctor.

I arrived. There was nobody there. All of a sudden I see somebody. I stopped him and asked, "Who are you?" And he said, "I am the commandant of the brigade." And I asked, "Were there any orders about preparing some quarters for me?" And he said, "No, sir, there were not. There were none. But I decided to meet you." I asked him to show me where the staff headquarters was, and when I arrived there I saw two officers, one a second lieutenant and the other a full lieutenant, Eschin and Konovalov. The former was in charge of quartermaster affairs. I later made him my personal adjutant. I was talking with them and trying to find out why there were no orders for preparing my quarters. The temporary commanders of the brigade were Staff Captain Zuev and Staff Captain Baev. So I said, "Very well, gentlemen, let me have this room for me and my retinue, and the rest of it I will take care of."

However, I immediately issued an order requesting that all commanders arrive for a meeting with me the next morning at eight o'clock. This was already after midnight. I did this for the purpose of making sure that my authority would be recognized. At eight o'clock everybody was there.

We had very little time to prepare ourselves for the forthcoming offensive. I received from the Chief of the Army Staff, Schetinkin, a note that the Commander of the Army had ordered that when I inspected a brigade I should tell him whether or not the brigade would or would not attack in the forthcoming offensive. Anyway, when everybody arrived in the morning, I held my meeting and was satisfied.



Raymond: I would like to ask you what your impressions were at that time of the government of Ufa and of Kamuch. You were a monarchist. Why did you not react like other officers did who refused to work with these governments and went into the rear in Siberia rather than fight for them?

Moltchanoff: You mean completely abandon the struggle? I considered that this was a great shame on the part of those who ran away from fighting the Bolsheviks--that it was necessary to fight the Bolsheviks no matter under what flag or for what government you were fighting. Kamuch I did not recognize. I didn't recognize Kamuch but did immediately recognize Admiral Kolchak. I must digress for a while. You know, I heard a rumor that there was an overthrow of the government in Omsk and that now the head of the government there was Admiral Kolchak, about whom I had heard much as a naval hero in the Black Sea. I was sitting there and waiting for the receipt of official information on this from General Lupov. Finally, seven agitators arrived to my detachment. I was informed that they came to agitate for Kamuch. I told them, "Gentlemen, these six men and one woman are not going to be allowed to agitate in my detachment. Get the devil out of here, and if you don't go back to Ufa, I will arrest you. There will be no agitation in my detachment. And I am afraid that if I tell my people that you came here to agitate none of you people will leave here alive."

Then I decided to recognize Kolchak independently, since I had received no official information about this. I had one officer who was very devoted to me in Ufa; he always let me know what was happening in Ufa and in Omsk. I contacted him by direct wire and started asking him about all this in a secret fashion. I asked him to transmit a message directly to Admiral Kolchak in Omsk, and right there I dictated a telegram informing the Admiral that I recognized him as the ruler of all non-Bolshevik Russian land and that I did not recognize Kamuch. When it was confirmed to me that Omsk received this telegram, I informed Ufa that I had done this and that I did not recognize Kamuch. At this time General Lupov had no choice and had to recognize Admiral Kolchak also.

You asked me about going to the rear and not fighting. I considered that this was a disgrace, that officers were running away from battles with the Bolsheviks and were hiding themselves far in the rear in Siberia to save their skins. I could not do this. I considered that everyone was obligated





Moltchanoff: to fight, not so much for a Kamuch--I was totally indifferent to Kamuch. In fact, if the Kamuch had ever arrived at my area, I don't know what would have happened to them. They were all S.R. members of the Constituent Assembly that had been elected in 1917 but had been dispersed by Lenin. All of them were scoundrels except for one--Fortunatov--who later became commander of a special detachment and had to retreat into Turkestan. He was a former officer and a fine man.

If you had suggested to my officers that they go to the rear, none of them would have accepted this. I considered that those who ran away were traitors, especially those remnants of the cadre officers, and especially generals who did this. Why didn't they come to command and direct us? Why did they go to the rear? And then later they dared to criticize us.

Raymond: I would like to know more about the Izhevsk and the Votkins troops. How did it happen that these workers all of a sudden became members of the White armies?

Moltchanoff: You see, this is how it happened. The first uprising of the Izhevsky workers was in August of 1918. The whole thing was that front line troops had just returned--these were former workers, former mechanics, mainly, technical experts, people who had lived in surrounding villages but who were working in this factory which belonged to the treasury. The workers there had good salaries, owned their own homes with their own gardens, which were given to them by the government. In short, they lived quite well. When these men returned from the front and wanted to start working again, the Reds there made demands upon them that they should join the Red Army. These workers were being drafted by the Bolsheviks, in fact, and this is what caused them to stage an uprising against Soviet power. They did not want to be robbed by the Bolsheviks, and they considered that the Bolsheviks were taking things not for the whole people but just for themselves, and they didn't want to go into the Red Army and said, "We will not go."

The men of Izhevsk pushed the Reds away and ten days later the Votkinsk factory joined them, and a whole big struggle began. Colonel Efimov wrote about this whole story in great detail. These were freedom-loving people, and they lived in such a way that nobody dominated them, and they didn't want a new power to oppress them.

Would you believe that there were among them men who called



Moltchanoff: themselves Bolsheviks--revengers? They said that they were Bolsheviks according to the Bible. "We love our God and we love our neighbor as much as we love God," they would say. They fought under me later--father and son together. The old man would be 64 and the son would be 16. They would stand side by side. They had a certain kind of enthusiasm and were never willing to accept Bolshevik rule. They never surrendered to Bolshevism and have now been scattered all over the world. They live as free people, and nobody oppresses them.

The commander of the brigade was Staff Captain Zuev. They had a model rifle company commanded by Lieutenant Konovalov who had graduated from military academy in 1909. These men--there were a hundred of them--were from Izhevsk. They were students from Izhevsk high school. They were exceptional soldiers. They marched magnificently and behaved themselves like cadets and I decided that they would be my future officers.

The first thing that the Army Chief of Staff had told me to do was to relieve any commanders of the Izhevsk Division who I felt had to be changed. He promised me that Headquarters would supply me with suitable candidates. But I told my Izhevsk commanders, "Gentlemen, I will not remove any of you, and you will remain as long as you show yourselves qualified and capable." "Furthermore," I said, "I'm going to get acquainted with you, but you gentlemen must remember that all of this work that we have to do in reconnaissance and in defense doesn't consist of anything new because this is all well laid down in manuals, and is all material that you should know from the past." Later, when I had to transfer two officers, in order not to hurt their feelings, I arranged for the transfer of Captain Zuev and Baev to the Academy of the General Staff in Omsk. I suggested this to them, and they gladly accepted because this saved their face.

The second regiment consisted of soldiers who were primarily from the villages surrounding the Izhevsk factory. However this regiment was lined up to greet me with an orchestra of some sixty people. Their uniforms were almost non-existent. For instance, one of the orchestra members was dressed in a civilian suit; some had regular shoes; some had Russian felt winter boots. God knows how they were dressed. They played magnificently. I greeted them and ordered them to stand at ease. After I did this I went around the regiment and talked to the officers and soldiers. In talking to them I discovered that their only complaint concerned supplies, because in terms of their combat ability and their readiness



Moltchanoff: for combat it was obvious that their morale was high and that they could go into action at any time.

The relationship between their officers and the soldiers was excellent and friendly. The officers were obviously relating to the soldiers as to their own relatives because otherwise it would not have been according to the Izhevsk style. There, if you are an officer it is only because you have more ability in military matters. They answered my greeting with the old imperial formula "Glad to try your High Well-bornness!"\* When I showed my astonishment at this greeting and asked the commander of the regiment why they addressed me thus, he explained that he didn't know and promised to find out. Later, it turned out that the soldiers had decided to greet me in the old-fashioned way in order not to hurt my feelings and to stress the fact that they felt that they represented remnants of the old army and not some new revolutionary army.

Raymond: Were the officers that were commanding these regiments and companies from the Izhevsk area themselves?

Moltchanoff: Yes. They were all from Izhevsk. In this division they elected their own officers from those men who had the greatest amount of popularity among the soldiers and who would make the best military leaders. Anyway this regiment made an excellent impression upon me.

I ordered that everybody over 55 should move several steps forward and thus discovered that the oldest man in ranks was 68 years old, and right next to a 64 year old man there was his 16 year old son. So I asked, "How are you during combat?" And the old ones answered me, "Well, when we are advancing we can keep up with the enemy, but when we are retreating then we cannot keep up and go as fast as the young ones." I told the old men that they would not have to advance any more because before the next battle I would send them to various rear echelon jobs and replace them with younger soldiers. And I told them that they would work in the quartermaster corps. The young ones immediately shouted, "Hurrah," to indicate their happiness with my decision.

This regiment had forty cavalrymen who were reconnaissance troops. This was the custom there. They always had their reconnaissance mounted, but they didn't have any saddles, so most of the fellows had to ride on pillows. Their whole

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\*This was the customary greeting, the mandatory greeting, of soldiers to officers in the Tsar's army and had been abolished after the Revolution.



Moltchanoff: supply situation was just terrible. It made me feel sorry to look at these soldiers. After all, it was winter, and it was very cold, and most of them were not dressed properly. The only other thing I promised them was that all of their commanders would be tested in the first battle and then I would consider changes.

The first regiment was slightly less well disciplined on the parade grounds than the rest, but they, of course, knew how to handle their guns. I passed in front of them slowly in review. Their orchestra was the same as the other one that I had heard. I told them, "I will not take any of you into battle until you are dressed properly."

The seventh company of the first regiment consisted exclusively of former technicians from the Izhevsk factory. These were educated people, and about them the following was said: "They didn't like discipline but in battle they were always first." I didn't pay too much attention to parade ground discipline, but realized that the first thing that I had to do was to put them in some kind of Christian shape as far as their dress and uniforms were concerned. I called them "ragamuffins."

Raymond: Why do you think you were made commander of this particular division?

Moltchanoff: They told me at headquarters that I had particularly distinguished myself as the commander of a spontaneously formed detachment and that they had confidence in me. I was told, "If you were able to lead a whole detachment without even a chief-of-staff and still maintain discipline and good supply situations, you can do it again." I think that General Vetsakhovsky had a great deal to do with this.

Raymond: Had you met the General yet?

Moltchanoff: No, but I met him later, and I think that he could judge me by my actions during the previous few months. He was the only general who really understood the military situation at that time and who assigned tasks which were fulfillable. Even General Kappel often gave orders in terms of divisional tasks, forgetting the fact that our divisions consisted often of no more than 1500 men as compared to the regulation wartime divisional strength of something like 14,000 and as compared with Soviet divisional strength which was at least twice as large as ours. The Soviets had three regiments while we had four, but our regiments were very, very small.





Raymond: Before you took command how was the Izhevsk Division evaluated by the White Army High Command?

Moltchanoff: They were considered as just another military formation and had not yet won their fame.

Raymond: In other words, you were given a difficult and a very responsible task?

Moltchanoff: Yes. As soon as I inspected the division, I realized that this was a very responsible and difficult and yet challenging task for me. In fact, in a short time I lost something like fourteen pounds. I was, in fact, the only officer besides the ones that I mentioned whom I brought with me, who was not actually elected by the soldiers themselves.

After I reviewed the second regiment, I then reviewed the first regiment. I told this regiment the same thing with regards to their older men. I had an interesting experience during my inspection of the artillery detachment. This was commanded by Praporshchik\* Kouznetsoff. I asked myself, "My God, does he know enough to command an artillery detachment?" The first thing they told me was that in the winter time they pulled their cannons separately from the caissons. However, because they carried their cannon on sleds, they were able to pull them up a 45 degree incline if necessary, and the cannons would not overturn. When I discovered that indeed it was impossible almost to overturn a sled, this turned out to be a great aid for us in the future. And what amazed me most was that they were able to assemble the cannons in not more than three minutes. The commander of this artillery detachment was a very good mathematician. He was able to direct fire in such a way that after the first shot he was almost always on target, and when the Reds were in combat with us they always knew when the artillery of the Izhevsk regiment was firing upon them because of the accuracy of the fire. And they would at that point immediately start removing their exposed cannons because they knew that they would be soon destroyed.

In some of the books published by the Soviets, the fact that the Izhevsk division fought well is mentioned. For instance, in the Archive of the Red Revolution there was a very detailed account of all our major battles and of our actions from the Soviet point of view.

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\*Second lieutenant



Moltchanoff: I will later be telling you about the battles near Cheliabinsk. Our Army High Command decided to chase the Reds into a cul-de-sac there. They were going to attack the Reds from all four sides. This plan was theoretically fine, but what was not taken into account was that the fighting quality of the White armies was not up to par. For instance, some of the detachments commanded by General Kappel were not strong fighting units because a large part of their soldiers consisted of men mobilized by White authority, and these men did not want to fight and readily went over to the Reds.

The Reds were trying to encircle us with the left flank of their Fifth Red Army, and I, for the purpose of supporting the 13th Siberian Division, which was superbly equipped and very well trained, was supposed to protect this flank. The 13th Division went into battle and fought well, but when the heavy Red artillery started firing at them they turned and ran. And then I had to give them support. These events took place much later. I only mention it here because I want to illustrate the fact that in some of the Soviet accounts that I have read about this battle they said, "Our Red troops were doing well when all of a sudden Moltchanoff and his Izhevsk division arrived on the scene and spoiled everything for us." I am often embarrassed by such praise because often it's exaggerated.

All right, let me return now to my account of my first inspection of the Izhevsk Division. My cavalry troupe was terribly equipped, with most of the second squadron sitting on improvised pillows instead of saddles. This gave me a bad impression, but I found out that the commander of the second squadron, an Armenian whose name was Bagianz was extremely brave, and this was enough for me.

#### White Advance--Spring 1919

Shortly after this inspection I was ordered to move my brigade to forward positions by the sixth of March, 1919, and to prepare for the general offensive. They put me in the Third Army Corps, which was commanded by General Golitsin, who actually came and inspected us once. He said nothing, but I could see by looking at his face that he thought we were complete ragamuffins. This is because in some of his other regiments, for instance in the Seventh Ural Division,



Moltchanoff: they had regiments which were drilled according to pre-war Prussian parade standards. The 25th Regiment of this Ural Division, for instance, was called the Admiral Kolchak Regiment. I was astonished by this because I didn't think that people who were still alive should have their names given to regiments.

During the advance I gave to my two regiments the task of advancing parallel to each other in two columns approximately six versts apart from each other. And I personally went all the time zigzagging from one to the other regiment. I only had two regiments and a reserve battalion, and that battalion went behind and as men of the two regiments were wounded or killed they were replaced from this reserve battalion. This was my system. When attacked, I gave orders that no commanders or officers or soldiers had any right to lean over wounded or dead soldiers. They had to go on attacking, and the wounded were picked up by women who followed at a distance behind.

During this offensive I had no chance to make any reconnaissance; all I knew was that I had to start advancing at dawn on the sixth of March, 1919. And dawn started about six o'clock. There was some thaw already, and some of the small streams were turning into water. There were no bridges in the region where I had to attack. We again crossed through the Ural Mountains to the west, and this was done without battle, because there were no Reds actually in the mountains. They were on the western slopes of the mountains. It was beautiful, and we crossed the Urals without any difficulty and relieved the 14th Ufa Regiment, which had stood on the front line.

To the left of us were the 25th, 26th, and 27th Regiments, each of which was commanded by a general. Towards nine o'clock in the morning we had occupied the area which we were scheduled to occupy during the whole day, and we were still moving extremely fast. The third battalion of the First Regiment hit some machine gun emplacements. These nests were sitting on top of a small hill and were covering the area that had to be crossed. The commander of this battalion, Lieutenant Lovchin, shouted, "Fellas, they will not be able to shoot us all. Tie your guns across your shoulders and take out four knives and then let's charge these nests of machine guns." What do you think? The Reds were not able to hold and panicked and ran away from their machine gun emplacements. So we fulfilled our task.

To the left of my Second Regiment was the 25th Regiment of



Moltchanoff: the Seventh Ural Division was not doing so well. It was not advancing at all, so I sent my Second Regiment to the rear of the Reds and even took some of their cannons. But I didn't grab these cannons for my own use but left them for the 25th Regiment, which eventually got there.

We were moving towards the Belaia River, but I was ordered to let the 25th Regiment, the so-called Admiral Kolchak Regiment, occupy Ufa. I agreed to let them occupy Ufa even though my troops had advanced further and could have taken it easily. When we reached the road that went along the right shore of the Belaia River, I tied into the telegraph wire that linked the towns with the railroad station Chisma and heard Red commissars talking. I was only 25 versts away from Ufa at that time. The commissar was saying, "We are in such a desperate situation we don't know what is happening. The Whites are coming close, and we have no transportation means. Comrade, we have a full panic." The man from Chisma replied, "I cannot help you at all. We are also threatened by the White armies. They are advancing, and they are not far away." So then I started talking to General Golitsin by wire and said, "Give me permission to attack and take Ufa." But the general said, "No. You must advance forward according to the original plan." But I said, "Look, General, if that's the case I have nothing to do because I have no enemy in front of me." The commander of my First Regiment received the news that his baggage train had been taken by some Red bands that were working in the rear of the White army advances. He replied, "Well, let them enjoy it because first we must defeat the organized Reds in front of us, and then we will take care of the marauding bands to the rear." These were not so much partisans but just Red units that we had bypassed. As we were advancing so fast we were unable to take care of all the units that we were bypassing.

The Fourth Ufa Division was moving just as fast. This was commanded by Colonel Kosmin, a General Staff officer. He was moving in the direction of Chisma, and I was moving between Ufa and Chisma. While in general I was directly subordinate to the Army General Staff, during this offensive I was subordinate to General Golitsin, who commanded the Third Army Corps of Sharpshooters. Finally we occupied Ufa and took a great number of their supply trains. Ufa was occupied by the 25th Regiment, and from the south it was occupied by the Sixth Ural Division. At this point, neither one of those two units had to face the enemy, because the Reds had already moved out and were fighting only against





Moltchanoff: me. But we routed them thoroughly. As soon as my troops reached the station of Chisma, my division was sent to the reserve and was stationed at the Chisma station and in the surrounding villages.

There was a terrible snowstorm, but I was summoned to Ufa by the Commander of the Army, General Khonzhin, and by General Golitsin. What was there to do? I had to go there personally, and the only way I could do this during this terrible storm was to tie ropes from one telegraph post to another in order not to lose myself. I arrived at Ufa completely frozen and was poorly impressed by General Khonzhin, although I was quite impressed by General Golitsin. Anyway, they said that they had summoned me in order to discuss the situation created by the advance of a Red Army unit from the south against Ufa coming from the direction of Sterlitamak. The towns of Uralsk and Orenburg had already been occupied by the reds, and from there a large Red Army unit was advancing towards Ufa. They were only about two days march away.

I was sixty miles from Ufa on the railroad station of Chisma, which was west of Ufa, and I had to move south in order to protect Ufa from this threat. This was a Red counter-attack, and General Khonzhin didn't even know that there was such a Red army in this area, which I consider a terrible shame. I told them that I didn't have enough ammunition or enough artillery to accomplish the task of attacking this Red Army unit. However, they promised to supply me with everything I needed.

From the south the Reds were advancing. There is a road there from Sterletomakh and there is a population centered there, where a whole Red unit with twelve artillery pieces and about 2400 men was stationed. I went to the northwest of this point, and decided to lay a trap for the Reds.

By the way, the Army Command told me that I had carte blanche to do whatever I thought was necessary. After I was properly positioned, I sent my First Regiment to the southwest in order to lay in wait for the Reds, whom I expected to move to the southwest as soon as my Second Regiment attacked and pushed them out of a small clump of wood to the east of me. I was taking a tremendous gamble because I had a reserve of only one company of 100 men, but I felt that it was necessary to take this risk because it was not enough just to push the Reds away from the positions they occupied. I wanted to actually destroy them as a fighting force. That's why I took this enormous gamble. I gave to



Moltchanoff: the Second Regiment one battery with two guns, and to the First Regiment, which was sent to lay a trap for the Reds, I gave four guns.

Raymond: How many men did you have in each regiment?

Moltchanoff: Approximately 700. No more than 700 in each regiment actually went to battle. I myself went with the Second Regiment, and I left my staff headquarters under the command of Colonel Efimov. When I got to the front line of the Second Regiment, I discovered that we were facing a regiment of crack Red fighters, the Third International Regiment. This was an especially trusted Red Army unit, consisting of Chinese, Latvians, Hungarians, Communists, but I don't think of many Germans. The moment we started advancing they opened up at us with machine guns.

In the meantime I got news from my First Regiment that it had already fulfilled its task and occupied the village which I had sent them to. The Reds weren't beaten, however, they had merely retreated into the woods where we couldn't really follow them. Although I realized that I had a very hard task attacking the Red forces opposing me with only my Second Regiment, I ordered an attack anyway. This attack was inspired by one of the Red Cross nurses who shouted to her boy-friend, "Vanka, let's charge." This friend of hers grabbed a harmonica, put it in his mouth, started playing it, and they ran forward and the other soldiers followed them. And they were thus able to dislodge the crack Red unit from the wood where they were entrenched. When we took their positions we found not a single wounded because they had taken all their wounded with them.

Raymond: Why did you think that if your Second Regiment succeeded in defeating the Reds they would move west to fall into the trap laid by your First Regiment?

Moltchanoff: Well, because there was a road leading in that direction. They almost had to go that way. But these Reds tricked me. Very cleverly, instead of going on the road, they went through the forests, through the paths in the forests.

I left only one engineering company in the positions we had occupied from the Third International Regiment, and ordered them to open fire with the two Lewis machine guns against the main village where the Reds were entrenched. Then I personally led the Second Regiment the next morning against the village as soon as the Lewis machine guns started firing. The Reds there had seen the Third International



Moltchanoff: Regiment defeated the day before, so they panicked, abandoning twelve of their cannons, and ran away through the woods.

As a result of this battle, we were able to acquire twelve additional cannons for the Izhevsk Division. This was confirmed by the Army High Command, which ordered that these cannons be permanently attached to my division, giving me altogether fourteen cannons to operate with.

After this battle we continued our advance to the west. My troops were having a very difficult time advancing because the snow was so deep. In front of me was the Red division commander Eihe. I had in reserve only my cavalry troop, led by the Armenian, Bagian. Once I ordered him to attack, but he replied, "How can I attack, your Excellency? Our horses can't get through the snow." To show him, I grabbed a horse and jumped on it and shouted an order for everybody to follow me, and we managed to get through the snow and cut into the Red lines from the back. We were able to capture two cannons together with their horses that were getting ready to pull out. The Reds panicked to the extent that they didn't put up much of a resistance, and we had almost no losses. It was at this point that a big change took place in my relationships with the troops under my command--I had proven myself to them by leading the cavalry charge personally. From then on they knew that not only would I give orders but that I was willing to be the first in combat too. And they said, "Oh boy, what a commander we've got." After this they really took care of me. They protected me, always made sure that I ate well. Even when they were half-starving they would always insist on bringing me some little piece of additional food. They fed me beefsteak at five o'clock in the morning. They said, "Give him steak with blood. He will fight better."

After this, I moved forward to the west for twelve days without encountering any resistance whatsoever; there was nobody to the left or to the right of me to oppose my advance. We were heading from Ufa towards Buguruslan. The ultimate aim of our offensive was to reach Samara, which is today called Kuibishev, on the Volga River. And then, of course, we hoped to move from there west towards Moscow.

We moved so fast that we bypassed numerous Red Army units as large even as a whole regiment. I didn't worry too much about them because we felt that we could clean them up later. Likewise with prisoners--we would disarm them and send them



Moltchanoff: in all four directions because we didn't have any use for them and didn't want to bother keeping them as prisoners. I never wanted to take them into captivity. In fact, I used to say to them, "Fellows, if you want to go with me, fine. If you want to go back to the Reds, that's fine too. I will, in fact, open up my front line and let you go through."

Raymond: Why would you have this attitude?

Moltchanoff: Because I knew perfectly well that once they had been captured by us they would not go back and fight for the Reds.

Raymond: And you didn't shoot any of them?

Moltchanoff: No. We never shot any soldiers, only commissars.

The man who was facing me, Eihe, was a former officer of the Imperial Guards.

Raymond: How was it then that he had become a Red?

Moltchanoff: Well, there were many, many cases of this. Innumerable officers went over to the Reds, even some who were generals and even some who had been adjutants to His Imperial Majesty. It is true that they were often forced to do this, but I feel that officers of such rank should not have run away to Siberia nor should they have remained when the Reds came, but should have organized resistance. These experts who served the Red Army caused us a great deal of harm because they had high military qualifications and experience. In one of the villages that we occupied, the priest told me that the Red commander Eihe had been very unhappy because he had wanted to surrender and didn't know how to surrender to me. And I replied, "Well, if he wanted to surrender, he could have. I never shoot anybody, especially former officers." However, I don't know if I believe all this because at another time we surrounded a village where Eihe was stationed and opened fire on it from all around with machine guns. However, when we occupied the village, we found that the Red Commissar and Eihe, the Red commander, had both already galloped away on excellent horses. Eihe was well known to own a magnificent stallion. Eihe himself wrote a book describing these events but doesn't mention himself at all.

After I reached a distance of 25 versts to Buguruslan, I ordered in advance the monument to Lenin that had been erected there to be destroyed. There a brigade of Cossack





Moltchanoff: horsemen finally caught up with me and brought me orders from Army Headquarters which they had been carrying for twelve days trying to catch me.

This was the beginning of April, 1919, and the ground was so soggy from the melting snow that it was almost impossible to move my cannons. Anyway, I received orders to turn north and to join General Vetsakhovsky who was commanding the Second Ufa Army Corps. Since we couldn't use wheels, I ordered all of our equipment to be transferred to sleighs with very thick runners so that at least they could be pushed over the mud, and this worked very well. Anyway, I marched north for three days to reach my new position at Bogulma, which had been occupied by Whites quite a while ago. When General Vetsakhovsky saw me he said, "Oh my God, what are they doing? Why did they send you here? Here we don't need you because there is no fighting. But down south you are desperately needed because the Red Turkestan Army is attacking from the south. And here there's no enemy either to my right or to my left." It was here that I also heard that Admiral Kolchak, as Supreme Ruler, had raised me to the rank of lieutenant general. The soldiers heard about this and gave me my one and only pair of stripped general's pants.

At this time there took place a very stupid mistake that was made by General Khonzhin. He had issued an army order telling my Izhevsk troops and also Votkinsk troops that when the White Armies reached their native towns, the soldiers could go home and disband. This was a tragedy. Colonel Efimov, my chief-of-staff, and I were shocked. On the basis of this order, I had to allow all my troops to disband. Of course, the officers stayed with me, but all my soldiers just went home. The general had issued this order before we had started our massive offensive in March, and this may perhaps have affected the morale of the troops, but now we were faced with the tragic situation of losing one of the best divisions of the White Army.

After I lost all my division, I was assigned, together with my officers, to the task of training a new rifle brigade. The men who were given to me were Bashkir youngsters of sixteen and seventeen. There were some fifteen hundred or two thousand of them--but of course they couldn't even speak Russian. And my officers couldn't speak any Bashkir. These youths had been drafted into the White Army and were just terrible. I informed Army Headquarters that I couldn't command them because there was no way of communicating with them. At this time also some of my old Izhevsk factory



Moltchanoff: workers began to return since the White armies had had to abandon, once again, their native town and they didn't want to fall under Red rule. They started coming back--all my old veterans--to seek military service under me. Izhevsk had been occupied by us at the end of May, 1919, and that is when my soldiers disbanded, but towards the middle of September not only did many of them start returning but they brought other chaps with them. So now I had a much larger Izhevsk division, consisting of four regiments.

But, the period between May and September of 1919, I wasted a great deal of my time near Ufa trying to make soldiers out of these mobilized Bashkir youths. I finally succeeded in convincing the army staff that some use could be made of these youths if they were scattered among those army units where there were some non-commissioned officers who understood the Bashkir tongue.



## VI RED COUNTER-OFFENSIVE BEGINS

Raymond: Why did the White offensive stop in May?

Moltchanoff: Because there was a danger to our left flank from the south, from the Red Turkestan Army. Had Army High Command not transferred my division north, this danger might have been obviated.

Raymond: Were there no other reserves to replace you in the south and to defend the southern flank of the White Army against the Red Turkestan Army?

Moltchanoff: There were some other White troops there originally, but they were very unreliable. There was a small handful of officers and soldiers that had come originally from the Volga area. They were given a large number of draftees who did not want to fight and who not only ran away but also killed their officers. This was under the command of General Kappel. He should have been given command of some reliable troops rather than these unreliable draftees. Had he commanded volunteer troops rather than draftees, he would not have lost so many of his original group of officers from the Volga.

Raymond: Why did these draftees go over to the Reds?

Moltchanoff: Well, because these men were drafted from Siberia, and they didn't know what Communism was all about. They had never seen Communism. There had not yet been any real Bolshevik rule in Siberia as there had been in European Russia. And not knowing how bad the Reds were, these draftees were sympathetic to them, and we just could not do anything with them. And they thought that if they went over to the Reds, the



Moltchanoff: Reds wouldn't force them to fight. Of course, they were deeply mistaken because the Reds, the moment they captured them, would make them join Red units and fight. For instance, the 30th Red Army Division that followed us throughout our retreat in Siberia was manned to a large extent by former White Army soldiers and even some White officers. In fact, one of the high-ranking commanders of this Red division who served on Blukher's staff was a lieutenant colonel. At one time I held secret negotiations with him about the surrender of the 30th Division to us, and if I had had the money, they probably would have surrendered.

As far as General Kappel was concerned, I was against him being Army Corps commander. He was a good commander in the field, but he didn't take time and didn't want to take time for other things. And in a position as high as that of Army Corps Commander, one has to pay a great deal of attention to such things as supply, transportation, and so on, which Kappel did not like to do. He was too much of an actual front-line battle leader.

I also realized that Kappel never tolerated anybody around him who would be too effective. I think that this man wanted always to be at the very heart of matters and to be doing everything himself, and I think that to a certain extent he tended to gather non-entities in his immediate staff. For instance, at a conference of generals that he had called at his headquarters, he told his chief-of-staff not to bother attending the conference but actually to go ahead and fix us something to eat. This really amazed me because, after all, the chief-of-staff is the man who is supposed to know everything that is in his commander's mind and is supposed to be fully informed about all of the military decisions that are being made rather than to be used as an orderly.

This was very different from the way General Vetsakhovsky conducted his affairs. At his Army Corps Headquarters, everything was arranged beautifully and efficiently. His staff was working fast. He gave clear, definite instructions, and his orders were always totally in tune with the situation around us.

Raymond: Can you give me the names of some of the army commanders of the White armies in Siberia at this time?

Moltchanoff: The Chief-of-Staff of the army was General Dietricks. This man was a religious mystic and was very little interested in military affairs. General Lebedev was also there. He





Moltchanoff: had no talents whatsoever. Dietricks, of course, knew military affairs, but I think that, being a mystic, Dietricks had a bad influence on Admiral Kolchak.

Raymond: Who were the White Army commanders?

Moltchanoff: Oh yes, as far as the chiefs-of-staff under Admiral Kolchak--first, it was General Lebedev and finally General Dietricks. General Khanzhin commanded the Western Army. The Second Ufa Army Corps\* was commanded by General Vetsakhovsky. The Sixth Ural Army Corps was commanded by General Sukin and the Third Army Corps of Mountain Sharpshooters was commanded by General Golitsin. There was, additionally, a cavalry division and my Izhevsk division, which were under the direct command of Army Headquarters. I was directly subordinate to the Commander of the Western Army, General Khanzhin, and then General Sakharov when he took over Khanzhin's post. Beside the Western Army, to the north of the River Kama was the Siberian Army under the command of General Gayda.

The Siberian Army, on the right flank, was moving towards Perm, and on the left flank to the south was the Western Army, to which my division was attached. Then there was also an Orenburg Army someplace way to the south. And also there was an army commanded by General Bakitch, who was a Serb. They were moving along the steppes someplace, but I never had much contact with them. They were directly subordinate to Kolchak's Chief-of-Staff, but the communication with them was very poor and often they operated completely independently. Everything to the south of the Trans-Siberian Railroad was called steppes--very sparsely populated. Of course, there were a few towns there, like Barnaul, and there were some special White Army formations there, of course. These formations were organized especially to counter the activities of the Red partisans which were increasing there considerably. Later, with the defeat, these White units just scattered. Some of them went into Mongolia; some of them joined the rest of us near Chita and crossed the Chinese border into Manchuria.

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\*The White Army Corps consisted of a minimum of two divisions.



### The Great Ice Retreat

Moltchanoff: After September of 1919 we could no longer advance. We had reached our maximum positions then, and from then on the agony of the White Armies began. We heard all kinds of rumors about General Kappel's plans to gather together a huge Cossack cavalry and to break through the Red lines south of Ufa. But, of course, no such cavalry mass ever materialized.

Raymond: When you retreated, how did the population treat you?

Moltchanoff: The Siberian regions were extremely wealthy and very, very fertile. People lived there very well. There was a superabundance of bread. Unfortunately, there had never been enough transport to take these food products to European Russia where people were hungry. The population, especially in the highly industrialized areas, treated us with a great deal of suspicion. But the rural population fed us very well and treated us very kindly too. They all wanted to know who the Bolsheviks were. We tried to explain, but most of them didn't believe us. They would say, "How could Russian Christian people do all these horrible deeds that you attribute to the Bolsheviks?" Remember that all these people were well-educated. These were not people living deep in isolation. Most of them attended good schools, even those who were peasants. And, of course, they were very wealthy compared to the peasants in Russia and were far from being Bolsheviks. But they just couldn't believe what we told them about the misdeeds of the Bolsheviks. The trouble then was that there weren't enough radios that we could use to educate them.

Of course, this cannot be said about the peasants who had been relocated by government agencies from central Russia before the war. Although theoretically these peasants had received government assistance, in fact they were settled on huge acres of land that required deforestation. They lived for three or four years in great misery and near starvation before they were ever able to get themselves established. These people were not prosperous.

In general, the peasants were afraid to talk to us about monarchism because they could never be sure whether we were not Reds. Both sides used to lie in order to find out where the populations' sympathy was. Many times I heard from all kinds of people in Siberia that the White and Red was not so important, but that what Russia needed was a master.



Moltchanoff: "Yes, Russia does not have a Khoziain\*now, and this shows itself in all sorts of ways," they would frequently say.

Raymond: Let me ask you what the mood was among your soldiers in the White Army regarding the monarchy.

Moltchanoff: We already knew that the Emperor had been murdered. While the Emperor was still alive I tried to discover whether there was any officers' organizations that wanted to help smuggle him to safety but could not find one. This was still in 1918, when I had first arrived in Elabuga.

All the peasants that I talked to felt sorry for the murdered Emperor and his whole family. Our soldiers did too. But after we learned that the Emperor was dead we lost hope for the restoration of the monarchy. We did not see any possible successor. In fact, there was nobody in the Romanoff family that I could look to, so I thought that perhaps we would have an election of a new monarch because the Romanoffs had all blackened themselves. For instance, I knew Grand Duke Kiril. He walked around Petrograd with a red boutonniere. And I just heard recently that on the occasion of the 200th anniversary of the creation of the Order of the Cavaliers of St. George, his son Vladimir laid on himself the first rank of this decoration--the St. George Cross, first class, which was given to very, very few people in the whole history of Russia, to heroes like Suvorov and other most outstanding generals. And this Vladimir all of a sudden ordered himself such a decoration. I think that this was absurd. Maybe Grand Duke Konstantin Konstantinovich might have been equal to the task of becoming emperor, but, of course, he died soon after the Revolution. Nicolai Nicolaevich would not have been good as a military commander during the Civil War because he had acquired a poor reputation as an army commander because of the defeats on the Russian front in 1915. Actually, when the Emperor took over the command of the army himself, the military situation improved, maybe not because of the change of high command, but it did improve. And it gave Nicolai Nicolaevich a reputation of being a poor commander. But, of course, he would have never accepted the title of emperor.

Raymond: How and why did it happen that the White Armies began retreating east in September of 1919?

Moltchanoff: General Vetsakhovsky was only one day's march from the Volga,

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\*Master Хо́зяин



Moltchanoff: but on his right flank Elabuga was already threatened by the Reds, and the First White Army began to retreat rapidly. At the same time the enemy started moving his Red Turkestan Army from the south, threatening our railroad connections with the seas as well as encircling our salient and separating us from Kolchak's headquarters in Omsk. We were highly vulnerable to a complete encirclement. Our first hope was to be able to stop the Red advance on the River Ikk, which, although it was not very wide, was a rapid river, and we thought we could defend it, but we were not able to do so. Then we started retreating faster and faster towards Ufa.

Raymond: How many people were there altogether in the Siberian White Army at that time approximately?

Moltchanoff: I don't think any more than 60,000 at the maximum. But Eihe, the Soviet writer, against whom I fought as I told you, had some excellent accounts about this. Also, our own General Petrov wrote a book about this. We could have had more had the population been willing to fight on our side, but as it was all we could really lean on were volunteer groups, and these were gradually decreasing as casualties occurred. After the initial impetus in 1918, the number of volunteers grew smaller and smaller. And, for instance, the Volga volunteers, who were commanded by General Kappel didn't receive any reinforcements from their home regions at all. And many of those who went to Siberia never really joined any army or did any fighting.

By the time I got my Izhevsk soldiers back, we were again on the eastern side of the Urals. Fortunately, I had retained all of my officers, so that when the Izhevsk soldiers started returning I could rapidly reorganize my division to its old fighting strength.

As we kept retreating, things became very difficult indeed. For instance, near Zlatausta, a small town east of the Urals, there was a well known factory called the Kushinsky factory. It was slightly north of Zlatausta. I defended this factory, repelling at least fourteen attacks per night. The fighting was really fierce, and all that I had to rely on was one armored train. The Chief-of-Staff of the White Army at that time was General Sakharov. Many of the officers didn't like him, and many of the people in the government at Omsk didn't like him, because he tried to put some order and discipline into Omsk. He was trying to get all the rear-echelon officers into the army but did not succeed. There was too much resistance. He took the place of General Khanshin who was totally unable to relate his orders to the reality around





Moltchanoff: him.

An army commander, when he gives orders, must give them in such a way as to have these orders determine his subordinates' activities for a certain period of time. General Khanzhin kept sending orders which nullified the orders he had just given. By the time my division was completely organized, we were already near Cheliabinsk. General Saharov tried to organize a trap to catch the advancing Red Army by letting them come into Cheliabinsk and then attacking them from all sides. This idea was marvelous. There's no question about it. But the trouble was we didn't have the requisite strength. He was hoping that the 13th Siberian Division, commanded by General Zoshchenko would be able to execute this trap, but even though that division was an excellent one, it did not have the requisite strength.

The Reds had some excellent heavy artillery and some armored cars that we didn't have, so that Cheliabinsk was given to the Reds, but the trap was never sprung. My Izhevsk Division was on the right flank of the 13th Division, and we found out that it was a good division when it was advancing; when it started retreating, it dissipated completely. So the Reds were able to keep bypassing my right flank. When this became obvious, they ordered me to counter-attack the Red Army's encirclement attempts. As reinforcements, I was given cadets from a military school. I argued that this was totally unnecessary because there was no sense wasting future officers and using them up as simple soldiers. I was, however, ordered to throw them into the battle.

Raymond: So then, you are the general who let cadets go into battle in Siberia during the Civil War?

Moltchanoff: Yes, it was I. I sent them in the hope of finally breaking the Reds' back. There were some 200 of them, and they were excellent soldiers. I had fourteen cannons, and I was able to hold the Reds back with them. I put them all on a mountain and ordered them to fire at the bushes from which I saw occasional puffs of smoke which indicated that the Red artillery was hidden there. So I told my fourteen cannons to shoot all the shots they had left. I didn't send the school of cadets into the attack but used my artillery instead.

Soon after this I was ordered by the Army Commander to attack and advance on the Reds. I did not want to do this because I had just barely managed to stop the Reds and didn't feel that this was the place for me to start advancing. However, I was ordered by direct wire to launch an advance, and



Molitchanoff: I did so, suffering great losses. The Votkinsk and the Ishevsk Divisions lost a lot of men.

Anyway, soon I had to start retreating again. I informed General Sakharov that the Red left flank was so rapid that I echeloned my troops to the east about 100 versts, and in my opinion our central troops must retreat for two days, 150 versts. It was done and danger from the north was over.

From Cheliabinsk we started retreating to Kurgan. And then from there we retreated right to Petropavlovsk without any special fights. There weren't many combats during that part of the retreat. Petropavlovsk was occupied by General Kappel, and he had at his disposal some armored trains. I stood south of him on the Irtysh River. My First Regiment stood on the Irtysh River itself; my Second Regiment stood south of Petropavlovsk, and the Third and Fourth Regiments were held in reserve.

Everything was very quiet when one day, all of a sudden, I heard shooting all over the place in the little village where my headquarters were located. What happened? Later I found out that one of my regimental commanders had not reported to me the fact that the Reds had broken through and had bypassed him. Nor had I been informed that Kappel had moved out of Petropavlovsk. Kappel didn't inform me of anything. I jumped out of my house and started giving orders. We had to leave rapidly and even had to leave some of our guns behind. Everybody had run away. There wasn't even one orderly left. Even the chief-of-staff was running down the street. This was not in Petropavlovsk proper; this was in a village next to it. So as I was running on the street, I caught a horse that was already saddled and mounted it and galloped away to the rear, where I was able to start gathering the soldiers who had run away and organizing them into some kind of battle unit. I was able to get more than twenty soldiers together and led them in an attack against the village which we had just abandoned. We started throwing hand grenades, but we weren't able to stay in that village very long. As we continued to retreat, I was able to gather most of my men together again.

I had, as a matter of fact, been feeling very strange about not hearing anything from Petropavlovsk and had ordered the regiments under me to be on the lookout for anything peculiar. I said, "If you hear any firing, go and engage the enemy." The commander of the First Regiment did hear the firing, and towards morning he successfully counter-attacked.



Moltchanoff: I asked the Regimental Commander Colonel Lostchevich, "Why did you allow them to go past? And why didn't you report this?" And I immediately replaced him with somebody else. This is an example of how panic can arise out of absolutely nothing. This was a typical confusion that existed during the whole of the retreat of that terrible fall and winter of 1919-1920.

The White Armies continued retreating towards Kurgan. The Reds were supposed to have been stopped, and we were hoping to counter-attack them near Petropavlovsk, but this never happened. The bridges over the river were not blown up, and so the Reds were able to get their armored trains through and advanced in the direction of Omsk itself. I was south of the railroad, crossing with my units the seemingly endless steppes.

#### The Crossing of Lake Baikal

Moltchanoff: The crossing of the Yenisei River was very difficult. We were waiting for it to freeze solid enough so that we could cross over, and we kept retreating along the river bank just waiting for this to happen. However, the retreat was relatively disorganized and my baggage trains and supply trains had become scattered for quite a length of the way. And the Reds kept advancing constantly. I had no connection with any army command because during the retreat it was impossible to keep any contact with it. The only orders I had were to continue going south along the river bank until the river froze and it was possible to cross it.

It was there that we first encountered organized Red partisan units. This was already in winter, and it was a terrible thing. What could we do? Let's say that we occupied a village. The elders came out and gave you bread and salt in the traditional custom of hospitality. Just as we would get our troops bivouacked in the village, all of a sudden, there would be firing at them. Just go ahead and try to find out who started the shooting. Some of our army commanders would immediately leave these villages and burn them to the ground, but I never allowed this to happen and I forbade troops under my command to do this. The Czechs and other punitive detachments did this and also whipped the peasants. All this succeeded in doing was to make the peasantry furious with the White Armies.



Moltchanoff: Anyway, I decided to go visit Kappel at this time, because I needed to coordinate my movements with him. He was re-treating along the Transiberian Railway in a railroad car. We had no telephone connection with him at all, and I was moving east parallel to the railroad about 120 versts south from it. And, of course, I didn't know at any one time where Kappel was, and he never knew where I was either. Finally I decided to join Kappel for a conference and left Colonel Efimov in command of the Ishevsk Division.

Finally I reached Kappel. His train was moving very slowly. There were many, many other trains. Colonel Lovchevich met me there. He acted as Kappel's Quartermaster General at that time. I asked him, "What are you doing?" He said, "Well, what is there to do? I'm just now reducing the judge advocate's office and trying to eliminate it. There are too many people there, and we need more efficiency. At this moment I saw Kappel's chief-of-staff get out of the train, get into a sled drawn by three horses and go for a joy ride with his two sisters. It really astonished me that generals would be thus amusing themselves when our armies were in such full retreat, and there was so much disorganization. So I thought to myself, "Where did God send me? Why did I come here anyway?"

I went to Kappel and said to him, "I came here to get exhaustive orders from you. We must do something." And he said, "Well, what can I do?" I said, "Well, you should get off of the train and get on sleds and join your units. I also noticed that you are all caught up in a transportation jam. What you should do is follow the rules of tactics and throw off the tracks those trains that are less useful. You should open the railroad up." Kappel replied, "Well, these trains are full of women and children." And I replied, "Well, I'm not suggesting that you throw them off. But I'll tell you, I saw as I was passing a whole wagon occupied by one or two officers who are living it up." This, I told him, was a disgrace.

When I was still on the Tobol River, a colonel of the General Staff came to me from Admiral Kolchak and brought with him the epaulets for my whole Izhevsk Division, especially made for us. And also he gave my own epaulets to me. However, I told him that we would wear these only on parade because when we went to battle we didn't have any kind of rank distinctions so that the Reds would never know who was an officer and who was a soldier.

The colonel asked me for my opinion as to whether or not





Moltchanoff: Admiral Kolchak should abandon Omsk and go to the troops, and whether it would be all right for him to join my division. I said that, of course, the Admiral would always be welcome and that we would never betray him and to please do so because we would always be able to escort him and save him. But nothing apparently came out of this. I also warned the colonel that the Supreme Ruler should not be in such a position that he is in danger of betrayal from his so-called allies, because we had heard many rumors that the Czechs would betray him to the Reds in exchange for an untroubled passage through to Vladivostok. I said that if Admiral Kolchak ever had to leave Omsk, he would not be in need of any government because by that time things would be too disorganized.

My conference with General Kappel was a total failure. He didn't help me with anything. He did tell me that anything that I found in terms of supplies during my march along the railroad I should take. When I objected, saying that I wouldn't know who it belonged to, he said, "Well, just assume that it belongs to you."

At this point there was no thought on our part of being able to hold any positions. All we could do was to retreat and retreat towards Irkutsk. The only thing I could do was to march along the line of the railroad. I knew, however, that there would be no possibility of feeding my horses or anything else if I followed this route because the troops that were passing in front of me would take everything. You must realize that I was in the rear guard of the whole White Army at this point. I knew that I dared not go through such towns as Novosibirsk because of the danger of Red partisans. So I went further to the south of the railroad, moving a little south of Achinsk until we came up to Krasnoiarsk.

After that, we had to pass a terrible place called the Chertakhskaia Taiga\*. It is there that the White Army met its final ruin. After he left Krasnoiarsk, Kappel caught a cold. Then he went north and soon died. The crossing of the taiga was truly terrible. We came up to it during Christmas from the south. This taiga was supposed to be crossed only by the Third Army, but the Second Army also got there. Let me describe it for you. In all, it was about 60 or 70 versts wide, and there were some tiny little huts there right in the middle, where I think probably some foresters had

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\*A Siberian marshy forest



Moltchanoff: lived. A road went for miles and miles through this taiga without passing any inhabited areas. I ordered my First Regiment to go to the entrance into the taiga and to hold it against any attacks by the Reds.

I was called by the Commander of the Army to a conference. At this conference somebody said that they intuitively felt that the Reds were not going to follow us through the taiga, but I said that this was not true and that without any intuition I had already received the news that my First Regiment was fighting against the advancing Reds. General Baryshniskov then turned to me and said, "General Moltchanoff, please go back there and take command of any troops that you may find besides your own, no matter what army or corps or division they may belong to. I am placing them all at your disposal." This was at the entrance into the taiga. I did this and used all of the troops I could gather to reinforce my First Regiment, which was defending the rear guard.

By this time there was no road left in the taiga, only ruts and a terrible mess. I knew perfectly well that the artillery couldn't pass. The road had been all messed up by the retreating armies that had retreated ahead of us and was practically impassible. You couldn't even go on foot because you just fell in and got bogged down by the disturbed and overturned snow. I ordered my Second Regiment to retreat in such a way as not to walk on the road but parallel to it and told them to get rid of everything except bread and to abandon all baggage and equipment. At this point, the Seventh Ural Division, which was supposed to be guarding the entrance into the taiga, decided to abandon its positions on the pretext that the Izhevsk Division was coming up.

This whole column of retreating White troops was maybe making half a mile an hour speed. The roads were in total chaos. The horses were getting bogged down in the snow; there were not enough sleds. I had almost nothing, and what I did have was all used up. So when the cavalry squadron of Bagian came up to me, I ordered him to go around all of the troops and to force everybody, literally everybody, off of the sleds, and I allowed only children to stay in the sleds. I said, "Tell them that this order comes from the dictator of the taiga, General Moltchanoff." I ordered him to burn all the sleds that were liberated in order to free the road and open it up. We burnt more than 5,000 sleds at this point. Can you imagine what we did? We found a lot of frozen people in these sleds, also typhoid cases who had died. So we burned them with the sleds. It got to the point where one couldn't pass through because everything was covered



Moltchanoff: with corpses. What else to do? And while this was going on the Reds were constantly attacking. It's true that they couldn't bypass us because they were victims of the same road conditions that we were, but they kept following our rear guard and shooting at us with machine guns. Fortunately, my Izhevsk Division was able to hold them back.

I sent some of the Cossacks from the Orenburg Brigade forward to the other side of the taiga to see if that village was occupied by Reds or not. I also ordered that they find some peasants to see if there was another road that might be going parallel to this one. Finally we found such a peasant, and he showed us a road, and we were able to travel on that one at a trot. This road was untouched and therefore our mobility increased immediately. This road went for about thirty versts and then returned to the main road.

At this point I had already lost contact with my Izhevsk Regiments and was with the Orenburg Cossacks. I was not worried about having lost contact with my own regiments because I knew that they would pass through the taiga and we would then meet each other.

The scenes that I saw were indescribable. For instance, a little village in which every house was packed full of men who were dying from typhus and whose fever was so high that they were out of their minds already. Everywhere there were palls of smoke and the stench of burned sleighs and burned corpses. I seemed to have been kept busy issuing orders to burn this abandoned equipment and corpses during that whole period. Many felt that I was wrong in issuing this order to burn, but later on everybody seems to have agreed that I was right because if I hadn't done this, nobody would have been able to reach the other side. We left everything, including our artillery.

After I finally got out of the taiga and the last of our rear guard troops did likewise, I was met by an officer who requested me to confer with the commander of the group that was guarding the exit out of the taiga. This commander told me that he had been ordered not to allow any troops to retreat beyond this point.

In the meantime, the elements of my division were still moving forward towards this point from the west. I calculated that the very last elements of my troops would take about two more hours to emerge out of the taiga, and I told this general, "Look, I don't know who you are, but I'll give you a good piece of advice. Pack up your bags and go because



Moltchanoff: in two hours the Reds will be here. And there isn't a single man in the White Army who has not been sleepwalking for the last week and who does not keep falling off his horse from exhaustion." This general didn't say a word but immediately took off. I asked the commander of the Cossacks who were with me to place some of his men on watch near haystacks to make sure that they would report when the last element of our troops had passed. He laughed and said, "Well, they'll really thank you for letting them go into haystacks to sleep." As a point of fact, everybody was sleeping standing up.

Finally my troops all got out of the taiga. I let them rest for a couple of hours. The Reds who were attacking us were also falling down from exhaustion. We had nothing left to eat since we had lost much of our supply train. However, I had anticipated that something like this would occur, so I had sent all of the basic supplies of my division towards the rear several days before our retreat had started. And, indeed, we found our supply train about twenty miles away from the point where we had emerged from the taiga.

So, after having eaten properly and rested, we once again resumed our retreat. We began moving eastward in the direction of Krasnoiarsk. By the time I got close to Krasnoiarsk I was informed that it was already occupied by Reds and that several White attacks had failed to re-occupy it. By this time we had very little ammunition, and, of course, no more horses, and everybody was on horseback. In my absence, the Second and the Fourth Regiments of my division had been ordered by General Petrov into an attack on Krasnoiarsk, but because they were mismanaged that attack failed. In general, I don't know why General Kappel made General Petrov the commander of the Third Army. He had actually never commanded any divisions of his own during the Civil War, and I don't know why Kappel made him commander instead of Sakharoff. From then, we went on the Kan River. I suppose that your father told you about this particular episode of our retreat?

Raymond: No, not very much.

Moltchanoff: Kappel had already passed in front of me while we were going towards the River Kan.

Raymond: You know, my father commanded General Kappel's personal escort and when the general died, he brought his body to Chita where he was buried.





Moltchanoff: Is that right? I didn't know that.

Anyway, we were in a truly terrible situation. The Army Commander asked me what I was going to do, and I told him that I would move in a northerly direction, where I soon came close to the Trans-Siberian Railway. It was either early morning or just towards sunset, but, anyway, it was fairly dark, and in the distance I saw something moving on the Trans-Siberian Railway. I then ordered my commander of cavalry, Bagian, to race towards whatever it was that was moving and capture it. It turned out to be Red trains carrying silver coins and gold, but we let the train carrying gold escape us, unfortunately. We did get a great number of silver coins. All of my soldiers carried handfuls of silver coins. The Reds were taking this silver and gold from Krasnoiarsk on back to Russia.

After this incident we crossed the Trans-Siberian Railroad and went north towards the River Kan. Then, the next day we got to the Kan River, and it was easy for us to move because everything had already frozen. We made ninety versts on the river and moved in the direction of Nizhneudinsk.

Raymond: Where was Kappel then?

Moltchanoff: He was being taken on sleighs, and when I came to the first populated point after the taiga, he was in a hut and in fever and almost unconscious. He had pneumonia, because he had fallen off his horse into the ice and had caught a terrible cold and then had been forced to travel on sleighs for that whole terrible retreat. Then I saw him once again in Nizhne-Udinsk a few days later when I attended a war council at his headquarters. He was already dying. We wanted to send him on a Czechoslovak train to the rear, but he refused.

Incidentally, when I was retreating from the Kan and I had to cross the Trans-Siberian Railroad tracks, I was ordered not to do so because the Czechoslovaks were objecting because this would supposedly be interfering with the movement of their troop train from west to east. I resented this highhanded treatment of Russian troops on Russian soil and told whoever gave me this order that when the Izhevsk Division was moving the Czechs could bloody well wait. When we came up to the railroad track, a Czech officer came up to me and said, "You're ordered not to cross this track." And I said, "On Russian territory Russians move freely." And then I also told him, "You are here as thieves and plunderers. You just wait until we cross the railroad." This was the only way to behave with these Czechs. I would



Moltchanoff: have liked to attack them with force, but did not do it because we were aware that all of the so-called Allies would object. There were Italians and all kinds of other people who ruled or tried to rule over Russian territory. I had a number of encounters with these gentlemen.

I arrived at the conference, and there was General Kappel lying down on his deathbed. He called me. He said to me, "I cannot command the army anymore. I am dying. I would like very much for you to declare at the war council to the other generals that you would like the Third Army to be commanded by General Sakharoff." I said, "I will do that, Your Excellency." And Kappel said, "Please do this for me. I am dying and I would really want your help in this business."

When I came into the meeting, all the generals were standing. I was the first to speak, and I proposed that General Sakharoff take over Kappel's command of the Third Army. General Kruglevsky from the Ural Division said, "I go along with General Moltchanoff on this proposal." Many of the other generals were opposed to Sakharoff, but we carried the day. The reason they didn't like him was because he had tried to send a lot of the rear echelon officers from Omsk to the front and had thus made himself unpopular, as I told you previously. He had tried to get all these officers who were sitting around Omsk to take an active part in the defense of the city, but, of course, that was beyond even his power to do.

Raymond: When you were at Nizhneudinsk at a conference, where was Admiral Kolchak?

Moltchanoff: We already knew that he was in Irkutsk and that he had been arrested and turned over to the Bolsheviks. And, you see, at this point General Vetsakhovsky as Commander-in-Chief gave the Reds an ultimatum that we would not take Irkutsk provided that they would return Admiral Kolchak to us. And he promised that if they would do this we would go past Irkutsk. At this point General Vetsakhovsky was nominally the commander of all of the White Armies that were left in Siberia.

After we left Nizhneudinsk we started coming close to Irkutsk and to the Lake Baikal. As we were advancing towards the Lake Baikal, people discovered that I knew a lot about it because, of course, I had been stationed here before the war. So the conference that we were having was to answer Commander-in-Chief Vetsakhovsky's question, "Should we or



Moltchanoff: should we not attack Irkutsk?"

The situation was as follows. We had sent some officers there in disguise and found that there were no officer organizations within Irkutsk. In other words, no basis for help from inside the city. And the Czechs had informed us that if we attacked Irkutsk and if there was any fighting during which either White bullets or the bullets of the Reds hit any of the Czech troops or supplies, they would immediately attack us. And they actually had the power to do it because they had a lot of very strongly armored trains. I told the conference that I could take Irkutsk with my Ishevsk division even though we had lost a lot of them already, and I didn't have all that many left. All that I would want would be some cavalry, and that's all. But I could do this only if I had permission to fight against the Czechs. "May I have permission to do so?" I asked. "No," said General Vetsakhovsky, "you may not." I said we would be able to attack even though we didn't have any artillery. We could cross the Angara River, and that would be all. I personally felt that there wouldn't have been any great amount of shooting had we attacked Irkutsk because I think that there were a lot of White prisoners in Irkutsk who would have escaped during the fighting and come to our assistance. And the Reds weren't all that strong because they didn't have any regular Red Army groups there yet. What had happened was an internal uprising led by city Bolsheviks. We put the matter to the vote, and there was only one general who voted to attack Irkutsk along with me. The rest were against this attack, and the rest wanted to go around Irkutsk. I shook this man's hand and said, "I'm very happy that you felt this way because I want all the chances possible to pass through Irkutsk."

We actually didn't need to occupy Irkutsk at all though because all of the supplies were located at a station some twenty versts away from Irkutsk, and that's where all the government stocks were. As soon as we arrived there, we got new clothes for our soldiers and all the supplies we needed. And there was no need to occupy Irkutsk anymore after Kolchak had been shot. So finally we decided that we would go around Irkutsk, around the Czechs, via mountains, on a mountain road, and came out on the main road only after we had bypassed Irkutsk. And only then did we hear firing. Then, after a while, the Reds began to try to catch up with us, but all we had to do was to leave a small rear guard who were able to hold the Reds off.

As we bypassed Irkutsk, we went from the north to the south



Moltchanoff: and then west of Lake Baikal. And then we came out on the railroad that went towards and around Baikal, and on the other side there were also excellent roads. Then, when we arrived at the railroad station Listvianka, we didn't dare to go along the railroad track around Lake Baikal because there were some sixty railroad tunnels in this mountainous area, and we, of course, had no knowledge as to who occupied the tunnels or whether they would blow them up around us or what. It was too dangerous. So we knew that we had to cross Lake Baikal on ice.

At first we went on ice near the shore. Of course, there were big cracks in the ice when the ice expanded and contracted, but I knew about that and I had prepared portable pontoon bridges to cross over them. These were about fourteen or fifteen feet long, and we would lay them across the cracks to pass. This only happened twice. I wasn't worried about it because I was used to this kind of a thing. When I reached the middle of the lake, I sent some reconnaissance cavalry to cross the lake. It was about ninety versts across the ice from one shore to the other. This cavalry had gold coins with them and they were ordered to cross onto the eastern shore of the lake to see whether the towns in that area were in friendly hands or not. One of the problems of crossing Lake Baikal was that we were informed when we first came up there that the ice hadn't completely frozen over and that it was frozen over only in spots, not everywhere. The crossing we made was at its narrowest point, where the lake is some ninety versts wide.

I was ordered to cross Lake Baikal at the head of the troops. When we arrived at the shore, the fishermen living on the banks of the lake warned me that it was dangerous to cross the lake because the ice wasn't thick enough. They said that it was necessary to wait at least one day. But we didn't have this time. I told one of my commanders, "Go find some brave volunteers who will start going ahead on the lake first, if possible, with horses, but, if not, then without them. Take these men and cross the ice and find out who is on the station across Baikal and whether they are friendly to us or not."

We could have lost all of the horses because of the slippery ice, so I knew exactly what to do and I ordered that all of the horses be reshod with special kinds of horseshoes that would have pieces of metal sticking out and would prevent the horses from slipping and not getting up. And those horses that were not shod in this fashion did indeed fall down and a great number of horses were lost that way. But





Moltchanoff: the horses in my division were shod properly, and we didn't lose any.

I sent the reconnaissance ahead in the charge of an officer by the name of Panitovsky, who was instructed to go across as fast as possible and return. He was supposed to go even all night. We did, however, have one point of reference in a high mountain which could be seen from across the lake, and we travelled towards it. Anyway, we followed this reconnaissance troop the next morning. We had these bridges, and we moved very rapidly. We were all on horses. We didn't have any infantry. In fact, in some places we could even go at a trot. I ordered everybody to keep a distance from each other so that nobody would bunch up too close together and have the ice break open. The ice was so clean that it was transparent, and we could even see fish swimming under it. The ice was about one foot thick, and on that thickness of ice you can even trot a horse. At two feet of thickness you can pass light artillery. All this I knew from before the war. Right towards the middle of the lake, General Sakharov caught up with me and asked me for news about the reconnaissance troop that I had sent ahead. I reported to him that so far I had no news. I told him that I had sent them out on good horses, and that I was expecting them back any time. General Sakharov replied, "Let's you and me go up ahead first." I said, "All right. If this is the way you want it, let's do it." And I added, "Of course, we don't know who we will find on the other shore, but let's go." So we went, and we got about twenty versts ahead of the rest of our army when we met with the returning reconnaissance troop, at something like 25 versts away from the eastern shore of the lake. They informed us that on the eastern side there was a troop of White soldiers subordinate to Ataman\* Semenov, whose headquarters was in Chita.

#### Temporary Shelter in Chita

Finally all our troops crossed the lake safely, and we allocated out the troops to various houses of the village on its eastern shore. The commander of Semenov's soldiers was an officer who was drunk when he met us. This same

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\*Ataman is a Cossack military rank equivalent to that of general.



Moltchanoff: man later was under my command in Khabarovsk, and I had to send him back from the front line for the same reason--drunkenness. When we had a chance to regroup, we got all our soldiers in formation and celebrated the first funeral mass for all of the ones who had died during this terrible frozen retreat, and also a mass for the memory of General Kappel. And then we began to move towards Verkhneudinsk \* And our final destination was Chita, where we were to stay according to an agreement we made with Ataman Semenov. The agreement also read that while we were getting ourselves back into shape the troops that were going to guard Trans-Baikalia from the Reds were going to be troops of Ataman Semenov.

Raymond: What distance would you estimate that you had travelled during this retreat?

Moltchanoff: I would say that from the Kama River to Chita is about two and a half thousand versts.

Raymond: How many men did you lose?

Moltchanoff: We lost a great many men. For instance, in the Izhevsk Division, I will tell you right now, we had at least 25 per cent dead and wounded. But, in addition to that, there were huge numbers of those who were frozen or died of typhus or were captured because they couldn't go on.

The Ataman Semenov welcomed us very warmly. I was the last to arrive at Chita because I was, as always, with the rear guard.

Raymond: Let me interrupt you, General Moltchanoff, and ask you why you and your soldiers did not give up rather than face this terrible frozen retreat. I can understand why you as a general would not give up, but what about the simple soldiers?

Moltchanoff: They absolutely refused to do it. My Izhevsk workers wouldn't even contemplate surrendering to the Bolsheviks. My men knew that if they ever returned to a Bolshevik-controlled Izhevsk, they would be destroyed there by the Bolsheviks. There was no question for them about surrendering. In other words, the only choice we really had was either to retreat or to die. And so we kept saying, "We will march as long as there is any ground to march on. After we come to the ocean, if there's nowhere to go, then we will just have to dive into the waters and drown."

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\*New Ulan Ude



Raymond: Did you at that time have any hope of being able to reverse this defeat with the help of Ataman Semenov's forces?

Moltchanoff: No, I don't think that personally I ever had such a hope. I remember well thinking that Ataman Semenov was not strong enough to help us reverse the Reds. We considered that in his territory we would be able to rest up and re-equip ourselves because we knew that there would be the buffer government of the Far Eastern Republic, which was a buffer zone agreed upon between the Bolsheviks, the Japanese and the Americans.

Raymond: Did you personally have any hope of being able to reorganize the front and to begin a new advance against the Reds?

Moltchanoff: No. I never had such a hope. I already felt that the war was over.

Raymond: So soon?

Moltchanoff: Yes, so soon. When we came to Chita I knew that the war was already over. For example, when we first came to Chita...let me go back.

When I was in Verkhneudinsk, we decided to move on. I had been, as usual, in the rear guard of our armies and came into the town last, while Colonel Efimov was leading the advanced parties. I was at that time commander of an Army Corps, or what was left of one, and he commanded the Izhevsk Division or really what was left of the former division. Of course, by that time there was no division; there were just remnants of men. I heard that he was engaged in some shooting. It was early; there was fog. I was leading about 35 horsemen when I saw that some Red partisans were attacking us from the right. I decided to lead an attack with these few horsemen. We started to shoot and to fight the Reds with swords. I was wounded twice, once in the hand, and in the other hand my fingers were hurt because a pistol hit my gun out of my hand. However, we succeeded, and we took 29 prisoners. There was a certain Colonel Lutkin who killed all of these prisoners whom I had sent to the rear. He did a tremendous amount of harm to me in this and in many other things. His action was terrible. There was no way that I could do anything because he claimed that he killed them in combat, but this was not true.

In any case, we managed to retreat some more. As I approached the Petropavlovsk factory with the remnants of



Moltchanoff: my men, I received an order from the Army Commander Sakharov that I should turn around and attack and destroy the Red partisan groups that had been harassing the retreating White Army. I realized that I could not do this, and I could not quite understand the order. Right in this Petropavlovsk factory there started a big quarrel with the Czechs who were occupying the station. These Czechs had sent me for liason purposes a lieutenant colonel who could speak Russian quite well, and he declared that none of us Russians, people from my Army Corps, had a right to come to the railroad station. And I asked him, "What do you mean a Russian can't walk on his own territory?" I said, "Go back and tell your commander that we will be going whenever we want to go." And, so, of course, we did. However, immediately there came an armored train that belonged to the detachments of Ataman Semenov, and the commander of the train came up and told me that if there was going to be any difficulties with the Czechs he would be glad to help me. Anyway, I gathered all my commanders together and told them to be on guard and to start preparing for a fight with the Czechs.

The Czechs immediately informed Ataman Semenov of this and claimed that General Moltchanoff and his Izhevsk troops were disturbing the Czech movements along the railroad. This, of course, was absurd because I wasn't disturbing them at all. Actually what the Czechs were doing was pumping out a lot of bread from the region and trying to gather up all of their loot before they moved out.

General Sakharov and his troops climbed on top of trains and left for Chita as soon as the Czechs were finished with their transport, but me, I was ordered to stay in the back and act as rear guard even though I was wounded and even though we had also been the ones who had led the march during that difficult period across Lake Baikal.

So we kept retreating, and this was not done without a lot of minor fighting against the Red partisans. Some distance from Chita I received a direct order to leave my troops with my second in command and rush immediately to Chita to attend a military conference. Of course, I had lost all my equipment and uniform and even my sword, but I was able to get a special engine on which I was driven right away to Chita. I knew that they were preparing a reception for me when I got there. I stopped outside the town and took a horse and coach to the women's gymnasium, where I knew the meeting was to be held. There a number of generals met me, but Ataman Semenov was not there,





Moltchanoff: and I knew that they were discussing or planning to discuss what to do with him. Ataman Semenov was in Chita, but this was a gathering of generals who had fought under Kappel.

Raymond: But had not Admiral Kolchak passed on the supreme authority to Ataman Semenov just before he was arrested and executed?

Moltchanoff: Yes, and as far as I was concerned Semenov was now our commander-in-chief. Anyway, when I entered into the room, I saw that the meeting was presided over by General Vetsakhovsky and that all the generals had stood up to greet me. This was very unprecedented. This was not the way meetings of generals were usually conducted because people would just come in and report to the presiding officer and that would be that. I felt that this was a great honor to me. However, I refused to participate in this meeting because they were discussing what to do with Admiral Semenov, and I felt that this was wrong. We had arrived to Chita where he was the boss, and we were his guests, and it was indecent of us to discuss his fate. He had arranged for a very efficient disposition of all our wounded among the various hospitals in Chita. Anyway, the meeting ended with nothing decided. I didn't want to have any discussions about removing Semenov and protested against such discussions because I never recognized that generals had a right to get together and discuss a superior authority.

The main thing the White command attempted to do in Chita was to put our remaining forces into some kind of a decent shape. We got new clothes for them. We spread them out among the various places in Chita and also in the surrounding villages just to give them a rest. At this time I was appointed commander of an army corps and spent quite some time attacking the Reds in the area. I participated and, in fact, led the attack on the Nerchinsk factory, which the troops of Ataman Semenov had tried to take before, but had failed. Even the Japanese did not succeed in taking it.

Raymond: Were there Japanese in Chita?

Moltchanoff: Yes. There was a whole division of Japanese there. They were supposedly guarding the railroad, and they let the Czechs go through but not the Reds, and in this sense they served as some kind of a screen protecting Semenov's troops. But no matter how nice they were, of course



Moltchanoff: there was no question that they were, in fact, ultimately pursuing their own goals, and these goals were pretty obviously to grab a piece of Russian territory and to keep it.

### Last White Resistance in Trans-Baikalia

Moltchanoff: Then during Easter of 1920, when the Reds started attacking Chita again and, in fact, succeeded in bypassing it, I went with General Vetsakhovsky to the front lines two or three miles away to observe their movements. The Japanese were sitting quietly in their trenches and eating rice, and then all of a sudden they were ordered to shoot, and they would shoot the Reds, and then would go back to eating their rice. Thus, the Red attack on Chita was stopped. I was offered the opportunity of following the defeated Reds with my cavalry together with the Japanese cavalry. We attacked, but the Japanese cavalry was late and didn't participate. This counter-attack was successful, and we took a lot of equipment away from the Reds, including the equipment of a former Imperial Guard regiment band. This victory was again accomplished by this wonderful Armenian cavalry commander I had--Bagian.

During this relative lull in fighting, I was able to reform my troops and get them back into some kind of a fighting shape, but I had only a very few soldiers left, not more than one thousand Izhevsk men, I would say. In the whole White Army all we had at this point was at most ten thousand men. But when people name the figure of 25,000, this was really including refugees and families. Semenov had less than 10,000, but, of course, some of his regiments had not been decimated by the winter retreat that we had gone through. In that sense his were much better regiments than ours were. Both his soldiers and Baron Ungern's soldiers had been formerly Admiral Kolchak's soldiers who had been sent back to Chita for recuperation when they were wounded. And after they came out of the hospital they would ordinarily join either Baron Ungern's or Semenov's detachments.

Raymond: Have you ever had an opportunity to meet Baron Ungern?

Moltchanoff: Yes. I'll tell you all about this. When I led the attack on Nerchinsk, I received orders to accept Baron Ungern as part of my detachment, as he had a fairly strong fighting force. Anyway, this was very close to the border between China, Russia, and Mongolia, where the Baron Ungern



Moltchanoff: was stationed with his detachment. The river he was stationed on was the Uldza. Anyway, the Second Army Corps was stationed at the station Olaviannaia. The Third Army Corps, which was mine, was stationed near Borzia, and Baron Ungern's troops were stationed near Dauria.

At that time there were two railroads leading from Chita to Vladivostok; one went north of Manchuria, and the other one went through Manchuria, through Harbin, into Vladivostok. The Czechs and the Whites could only use the one that went through Harbin but not the one that went above China because that was controlled completely by Red partisans. Anyway, I marched to the river Shilka, on which the Nerchinsk factory was located, and so did Ungern. At that time Blagoveshchensk, much further east, was in Red hands, whereas Vladivostok was in our hands. There were Japanese there, and the Reds couldn't get a foothold. The Americans had already left Vladivostok. This was in 1920.

Raymond: Would you tell me about your Impressions of ~~Admiral~~ <sup>ATAMAN</sup> Semenov?

Moltchanoff: As soon as I arrived in Chita, Semenov invited me for dinner. The first thing he did was to give me a present of a new sword because I had lost mine, and he gave me a watch because I didn't have a watch either. And he fed me, but a very, very simple meal--a little bit of soup and some lamb and some canned fruit. And then we talked a lot, and he started telling me, "I heard a lot about you and I wanted to talk to you. I realize that you're not interested in politics, but I wanted to tell you about my political situation. Can you imagine what would have happened if I hadn't been here?" he said. "There would have been a complete disorganization and a mess because there are all kinds of Cossacks who uprose." And I said, "Well, Ataman, they arose against you." And he replied, "Well, maybe they arose against my name, but if it hadn't been for my name, they would have arisen against somebody else because there was enormous propaganda against the Whites made by the Reds from the Nerchinsk and also the Sretensk." Later on when I was in that area, I realized that both the Cossacks and the factory workers wanted to drown Semenov and were really hostile to him. They told me terrible things about him, that he personally gave orders to murder people for nothing. But he made a good impression on me. I felt that he was a brave man who had received a St. George's Cross and that he was a fine soldier. But I don't know. I think maybe he was just a personally brave man.



Moltchanoff: Everybody blamed him for living with a very beautiful woman whose name was Masha. As far as I'm concerned she was a marvelous person who really helped us get our wounded taken care of in the hospitals. She would spend every day running around from hospital to hospital keeping things in order. I don't know about his personal affair with her, but he claimed that she had given him a lot of money and helped him. Soon thereafter she left with quite a bit of money, and he married somebody else. The woman he married, I understand, was the daughter of some Cossack priest in Orenburg.

After I took the Nerchinsk factory, the Japanese and the Reds agreed to an armistice. Nobody wanted to fight because everybody knew that the negotiations were being carried on with the Reds to form the Far Eastern Republic. The Japanese captain who was stationed in Chita kept telling me that the Japanese would leave soon, and I was expecting this from week to week. This was due to the pressure that the Americans were exercising on the Japanese Imperial Army.

Soon the Reds started attacking us again with partisan regiments. These were huge regiments, most of them consisting of Trans-Baikalian Cossacks because they hated Ataman Semenov. But I personally think that there was a great deal of propaganda coming from the various towns like Blagoveshchensk and other railroad towns infecting the Cossacks.

When I was advancing towards Nerchinsk, I was constantly surrounded on all sides by these partisan detachments, and my only communication with Chita was by a small airplane. And once the airplane came and said, "You better be careful and get prepared because rumor has it that the Reds are going to attack Chita from all sides." I wrote a letter to Semenov to find out if this was so and found out that the Reds were bypassing the various railroad stations near Chita. This was already September or August of 1920.

Raymond: Why did you station yourself on the railroad station Borzja instead of just proceeding directly to China and giving up the fight, since you already knew that there was absolutely no hope for the White cause?

Moltchanoff: Well, one had to keep some positions and roads open to allow all of the scattered elements of the White Armies to filter through and get to the Chinese border. In fact,





Moltchanoff: it got to the point where some of our detachments had actually to cross into Mongolia to escape the Reds. On the Olovyanaya station the general commanding there, Smolin, who also commanded some of the Votkinsk troops, surrendered. The Votkinsk, who were very close neighbors of my Izhevsk Brigade, came to me to fight the communists under my command.

Then I became the Commander of the Army as the remaining eldest general because the Commander of the Army with some troops retreated to Mongolia from Chita and later came to Borzia. We wanted to maintain our organized troops at all costs so as to be able to pass through Manchuria and get to Vladivostok. This was already the time of the last struggle.

With the last airplane Ataman Semenov flew away from Chita to the railroad station Manchuria and ended up in the Japanese port of Dairen, where he stayed. Baron Ungern was forced to move into Mongolia, which was not very thickly populated. He moved there across a border not controlled by Chinese government troops with his detachment still armed. Baron Ungern wanted me to go with him and march through Mongolia and march north from Mongolia to Irkutsk, but I refused to do this because I realized that it was hopeless. All he had was about 13,000 troops and quite a strong artillery detachment.

Baron Ungern was an officer of the Imperial Cavalry Guards. During the Japanese War he requested transfer into a Cossack cavalry division in order to be able to participate in combat against the Japanese, and there he stayed. As I was attacking Nerchinsk, a man came up to me and reported to me, giving me his whole military title. He knew me, but I did not know who he was. So Baron Ungern reported to me, "Your Excellency, etc., etc., etc." And I all of a sudden without knowing what I said, said to him, "But Baron, you don't listen to anybody." And he replied, "I do not subordinate myself to the thief in Chita, but I will subordinate myself to you."

At this time we had no salt and no sugar and the Baron gave us both. He was on the station Dauria. The way he got soldiers was to take them off railroad trains, and he did the same thing with any equipment he might want or need. He was a strange man. The people apparently liked him. I don't know why. He may have been cruel to his people, to his men, but as far as I know not so much to the population around him. He was



Moltchanoff: an extremely strict disciplinarian. I heard that he had all kinds of torture chambers. But when I was in Dauria later I never found any traces of any of the torture practices and techniques that people have said that he practiced.

I was in Dauria for a whole week while I was fighting the Reds, and I looked for these torture rooms and I couldn't find them. And his officers claimed that he was very strict but at the same time he was concerned for the welfare of his men. And also I think that if he had been such a beast, he would have probably been killed.

I agreed to work with him and accept him in my command if he would report to me daily and inform me of what he had done during the day.

By this time General Sakharov had already left for Europe, even General Vetsakhovsky had left. They just disbanded and left for Europe after Semenov gave them some money. They were all receiving money from Semenov. At that time General Versheblitsky, the Russian general who had commanded Russian troops in France during the First World War, arrived to replace both Vetsakhovsky and Sakharov. But this was already towards the end.

Anyway, I was able to take Nerchinsk without Ungern's help. From Nerchinsk I moved north. When Ungern arrived I started attacking the village of Bargak where two Japanese regiments had been destroyed by Red partisans. From there I started to transfer some of my troops by ship to Sretensk. Sretensk was where I set up permanent headquarters for the staff of my Third Army Corps. We arrived in Sretensk towards the fall of 1920, and when we got there we stopped. On our way there we had to sustain some minor combat from Red groups on the shore, even though we were on ships.

Often also, we would stop and give the Cossacks who were living in that area salt which they were lacking in exchange for eggs and other provisions. In Sretensk we were close to the Amur River and found it a comfortable place to stay.

During this period the armistice had already been declared between the Reds and the Whites and the Japanese, so that I even was able to drink tea and have conferences with the Red partisan leaders who were opposing me from time to time. This armistice allowed me to move my troops from Sretensk to Borzia. I stayed in Borzia until the very end, until



Moltchanoff: there was nothing left, and I was one of the very last White soldiers to cross the border into China.

There, on the Chinese station Manchouli I gave up my weapons and negotiated with the Japanese and Chinese. Everything was burning. I even had to burn some airplanes that had been abandoned without fliers. This retreat from Borz-ia to the Chinese station of Manchouli was very badly organized. It hadn't been prepared for, and it was just a terrible mess.

Raymond: Who at that time commanded all of your troops?

Moltchanoff: In fact, the army, what was left of it, was commanded by General Verjbitsky, who had been the commander of the Second Army Corps. And I was immediately subordinate to him.

Raymond: You were directly subordinate to him and not to Semenov? Semenov didn't participate then in commanding the armies.

Moltchanoff: No, but he tried to. For instance when General Vershebitsky was in Manchouli I had received orders from General Sukin, Chief-of-Staff for Ataman Semenov, to advance there and there and there with three columns, and, of course, this was all impossible. So I got General Sukin on the line from Borz-ia and spoke to him for hours trying to prove to him that his orders were absolutely impossible. And I said, "I will accept no orders before General Vershebitsky arrives." And that was all.

Ataman Semenov arrived to see me. He came to Borz-ia on an armament train with all of his guns directed on the main square. I saw this so I ordered all of my artillery to put all the cannons on the square and train them on the train. Only then did I go into the train. So I said, "All right, Ataman, you directed your cannons at me, so I directed mine on you. Try to move your train and you will find your train blown to bits. And if I don't leave the train when I'm supposed to, I've already left orders that the train be under direct fire." Ataman Semenov immediately said, "Oh, General, what are you doing? Everything is all right." And I said, "Ataman Semenov, you are now trying to issue orders when there is nobody left to order about. You're trying to tell the army how to cross Manchuria, and you have nothing to command with." So that's how this was.

Another thing Semenov tried to do was to bribe senior army



Moltchanoff: commanders by giving them ten thousand rubles in gold supposedly for "necessary expenses." He had all of Kolchak's gold, of course, under his control, and I knew what was happening to this gold because I knew a man who was part of the guard of this gold, and he always informed me.

I refused any of this money, but a lot of the other generals accepted. I issued orders in the Bolshevik style, "To All, To All," informing everybody what Semenov was doing, passing out money, and I also informed everybody that I wouldn't accept a penny unless every other soldier in the army got paid what they were due. Anyway, we had in the fall of 1920 a total rupture of relations. And when Chita fell, instead of staying with his troops in the Chinese station of Manchouli to make sure that the troops would be all right, he just flew off to Dairen.

The big negotiations that we had to carry on at the Manchouli station with the Chinese authorities were in connection with our arms. We did not want to give up our arms, and the Chinese would not let us into their country without having us surrender the arms. We were afraid that the Reds would follow us and attack us when we were disarmed even though this meant the Reds going into Chinese territory. And we also wanted the arms so as to be able to recross the border into the Maritime Province and Vladivostok after we had gone through Manchuria.

Raymond: How is it that you had to negotiate with the Chinese? Wasn't the Chinese Far Eastern Railroad in a special zone under control of the Russian military people?

Moltchanoff: No. When the Bolshevik revolution occurred, the Bolsheviks denounced extra-territorial rights, and the Chinese government had moved into the zone. The Chinese Eastern Railroad was at that time no longer commanded by the Russian general Horvat, but was managed by your grandfather, Boris Ostroumoff. The Chinese controlled everything however. They checked the trains, and they would not allow us to carry guns. I told the Chinese officer that he didn't have any strength to maintain his demands. Actually, these were not Chinese. This was a Japanese man who was head of the Japanese mission there. I started talking to the Chinese commander of the military detachment there-- he had been a Russian officer once upon a time, although he was Chinese. He spoke Russian well and was very sympathetic to us.

This Chinese officer told me to speak very roughly and





Moltchanoff: demandingly with the Chinese general because then I might succeed in getting what I wanted. So I talked through this interpreter in a threatening tone, and finally convinced the Chinese general to be reasonable with us, and that I would not surrender my weapons until he could guarantee me that the Reds would not follow us. By this time, almost all of our troops had already crossed the border. I was the last, with my Army Corps.





Victorin Moltchanoff - Vladivostok, 1921



## VII RETREAT INTO CHINA

Moltchanoff: Finally we entered China and, of course, my soldiers really got drunk that night. We were now in neutral territory. Then, shortly thereafter I went to Harbin, which was the headquarters of General Dietricks, who had been conducting all the negotiations with the Chinese and with the allies, as well as with the manager of the railroad. So after I crossed the border, I secretly went to Harbin to negotiate with Dietricks. And Dietricks approved of my orders and said that I was right in being hard in negotiating about the arms at the border crossing. When the Reds found out that Moltchanoff had not surrendered his weapons, they were afraid to cross the border and follow because they knew that I would resist them. On top of this, the Chinese also guarded the station Manchouli.

Dietricks succeeded in getting the railroad to transport us to the Maritime Provinces, and his negotiations were quite useful. Some of the soldiers that we brought across the border went with us to Vladivostok; others stayed in Harbin and in various other places.

Raymond: Why didn't you stay?

Moltchanoff: Well, how could I possibly have stayed? What would you expect me to do--leave my soldiers alone? Why should I have stayed in Harbin? I could always have run back to Harbin from Vladivostok. I didn't particularly want to. It's not that I had any hope for the civil war. I had no hope left whatsoever, but there wasn't much else for me to do. There were a lot of officers who stayed. Some



- Moltchanoff: even stayed in the station Manchouli, and others went to Harbin.
- Raymond: Did you have no hope at all for the successful resumption of the civil war?
- Moltchanoff: No, none whatsoever. I could have run away to Harbin years before, but I decided that I would stay to the very end with my officers and soldiers. I had a certain responsibility, after all. They had followed me and I couldn't just leave them.
- Raymond: When you finally crossed through Manchuria and came into Vladivostok, how long did you expect to be able to hold the Reds off there?
- Moltchanoff: We had absolutely no idea. We hoped that we could live there for a certain amount of time, until such time as all the interventionists would leave. We knew that after we were left alone it would be hard. Anyway, I thought that if we could have a real government there, we would stay for a long, long time. But the population didn't support us, and Merkulov's government was not effective.
- Raymond: Did you have any hope for a counter-revolution in Russia itself?
- Moltchanoff: No, not at all. Everything had already been taken firmly in hand by the Reds. On that there was no hope.





## VIII RE-ENTRY INTO RUSSIA'S MARITIME PROVINCE

Raymond: When you got to the Pogranichnaia station on the border between the Maritime Province and Manchuria, did the Chinese return your arms and ammunition to you?

Moltchanoff: No. We didn't go directly to Vladivostok, but we stayed in two stations between the Chinese border and Vladivostok, Razdolnaia and Nikolsk-Ussuriiski. I went to Vladivostok a few times. General Vershebitsky was still the commander of the army and subordinated himself to the Merkulov government in Vladivostok. When we crossed into the Maritime provinces in the late fall of 1920, there was first a socialist government in Vladivostok--the so-called Medvedev government, which the army considered socialist.

One of our White generals, General Lebedev, attempted unsuccessfully to overthrow Medvedev, but this coup did not succeed because it was poorly organized. Soon thereafter, however, we decided to change the government. In effect, this government was a socialist, non-Bolshevik government, but really it consisted primarily of people who were pro-Soviet and claimed neutrality only because of the agreement that had been made with Japan concerning the temporary buffer state, the so-called Far Eastern Republic.

Soon the commander of the armed forces of this government arrived to my station to meet with me and discuss matters. He proposed that I change sides and come and become the commander of their Second Amur Army. This army was to be stationed in Khabarovsk. He said that this army's task would be to defend Khabarovsk against the Chinese, whose activities began to be more and more disturbing to the



Moltchanoff: Russians in that area. And I asked him, "Are you not afraid that there will be a new attempt to overthrow your government?" And he said, "Well, I'm not afraid of that because the overthrow that you Whites have attempted did not succeed, did it?" Well, I replied to him that the reason that that did not succeed was because there weren't enough of our troops there yet, but when more of our troops would arrive to wait and see--we would have a new government. This Red Army commander certainly didn't make much of an impression on me. He was an almost illiterate worker. They just wanted to tempt me to cross over to their side, but I didn't want to. We drank tea together, and that was all. He said, "Well, I have tried to be cooperative with your soldiers in Vladivostok and not to cause any problems." And this was true. He was cooperative. And, in fact, when any of our soldiers misbehaved, he would send them over to us for disciplining.

In March of 1921 there was a successful overthrow of this Socialist government, coordinated by Colonel Efimov, who was the Chief of my staff in the Izhevsk Division.

Raymond: Why were you interested in such an overthrow if the Socialist government was not causing you any great difficulties?

Moltchanoff: Well, for one thing, we needed to have some civil authority to relate to, and we also needed to have somebody pay the army a salary. We also needed money to buy weapons, which we needed for our last struggle against the Reds. We also ate very poorly. The Socialist government didn't give us any food to speak of. We prepared the overthrow very simply. We developed a great big propaganda drive, especially through our churches, where the priests started giving sermons favorable to our side.

Everybody cooperated with us except one archbishop who wouldn't cooperate. We had a lot of priests, especially old ones, but then we also had a young priest who had been our divisional chaplain, and we wanted to have him be the chief priest in this area, and we knew that he was an excellent speaker and an excellent administrator and that we could work with him. General Vershebitsky ordered me to go to Archbishop Michael, who was the head of the church in this area and consult with him about nominating this young priest to the post we wanted him to occupy. But I had already warned the Archbishop through his secretary that if he would not consent to the raising of Father Leonid Viktorov to the position we and other priests in the army wanted him in, we would do it ourselves. I told the Archbishop



Moltchanoff: that we were desperate, that we had no place to go and nothing to lose. We were stuck with our backs to the ocean, so whatever we needed to do we would do. The Archbishop finally allowed me to visit him and agreed to make Father Leonid our chief army and fleet priest.

While preparations for the overthrow were being made, everybody knew that the overthrow would succeed. So, finally in March of 1921 we succeeded in overthrowing the Medvedev government. Of course, we didn't have any guns or ammunition then, but we took some material from the local militia.

Raymond: Were the Japanese still in Vladivostok then?

Moltchanoff: Yes, they were, but they wouldn't give us any rifles. Finally I bought some weapons from Japan for 30,000 gold rubles. We managed to get this money from the civil authorities. What happened was that a lot of trains commandeered by the Czechs were loaded with weapons of all kinds. These were stopped and they were standing on the railroad waiting to be unloaded. All these stocks had belonged to the Russians and had been stolen by the Czechs. I finally managed, however, to get the Japanese to sell some of our own Russian guns back to us for 30,000 gold rubles.

What actually happened was that the Japanese not so much sold them to us, but accepted a bribe to move their sentries away from the rolling stock which was loaded with rifles, and we got about 5000 rifles.

Raymond: Of all the generals who were with you under Admiral Kolchak, who remained with you at this time in 1921 in the Maritime Provinces?

Moltchanoff: General Vershebitsky, General Smolin, several Cossack generals who were in Grodekovo but who had served under Ataman Semenov, who himself, however, was already in Japanese territory. He tried to come to the Maritime Provinces, but we didn't encourage him. He had run away from us from Chita, and we didn't want him in Vladivostok at all. We didn't need him. And all of us stopped recognizing him as Supreme Ruler and successor to Kolchak.

Raymond: How long did the government of Merkoloov last?

Moltchanoff: To the very end--to the end of 1922 when nothing at all remained of the White movement.

The very last struggle of the Russian Civil War took place in this area in 1921-1922. The last big engagement was my



Moltchanoff: attack on Khabarovsk.

Raymond: During this period of 1921 after the overthrow of the Socialist government and the installation of the Merkulov government, what were you personally engaged in doing, and what were your hopes?

Moltchanoff: Well, what I was hoping for was that the government would begin expanding its influence, would start gathering taxes, would expand its territory. Taxes were not being paid by anybody at this point, and the Merkulov government was not receiving any revenues except from our customs. Finally we realized that we had to destroy the main center of Red infection in this area, which was in Khabarovsk, the city where all of their partisan headquarters were located and from which propaganda seeped through into Vladivostok.

Raymond: What was the attitude of the peasantry and of the Cossacks to you and to the Merkulov government?

Moltchanoff: Nothing special one way or the other. I would say that the population as a whole was very restrained towards the Merkulov government, and I think probably from their point of view quite correctly because they never knew when the Reds would show up. Of course, the refugees from Russia itself were much more open in their support of it, but the local native population didn't really know when our government would fall, and they had to be careful.

Raymond: What was your attitude toward the former Kolchak officers who, instead of coming to the Maritime Provinces with you, stayed in Harbin?

Moltchanoff: I had contempt for them.

Raymond: Did you consider that they were traitors?

Moltchanoff: No. I don't think so. I knew that many, many of them didn't want to fight again, and actually we didn't want masses of new soldiers anyway because we would have had to feed them, and we didn't have resources for that. When I asked for cadre officers to help I only got one lieutenant colonel from all of Harbin to come and help me.





General Moltchanoff Retakes Khabarovsk

Raymond: When and who decided to start the attack upon Khabarovsk?

Moltchanoff: The decision was a political decision and came from General Versheblitsky's staff.

Raymond: When were you ordered to move towards Khabarovsk?

Moltchanoff: In the winter of 1921-22. I first had to occupy the station of Iman. Iman was not a river but a town, and then I had to defeat some Red troops that were stationed nearby. Only then could I proceed to Khabarovsk. We marched for fifteen days. I had approximately 6000 men; maybe at the maximum, 10,000 men. At first it was difficult for us to march. It was difficult because we didn't know how our enemy would react and how strong he was. We first had to attack and occupy the station Iman, which defended the bridge over the River Ussuri, and to defeat the group that defended this bridge. But we had to do it in such a way that the bridge would not be blown up. You see, an additional difficulty was that by agreement with the Japanese we had no right to use the railroad for military operations. So we had to disarm ourselves and to move troops north along the Vladivostok-Khabarovsk Railroad unarmed. We made small armored trains, but disguised them by covering them up with straw. This was on the Ussurisk Railroad. After Khabarovsk the railroad becomes known as the Amur Railroad.

As I said, it was difficult at first. We had to move the men slowly and carefully. We even created a fake armed railroad train. Because we didn't have any cannons we made fake cannons out of wood, and, of course, this had the intended effect on the Reds. They thought we had an armored train. The first Red troops that we defeated was their Sixth Regiment, which was a big regiment, but it didn't really want to fight us. The Red troops were commanded by one Sereshev. When I took the town of Iman and gave my troops a chance to rest up, I was finally able to find out what the Reds had against us. We had no cannons; they had two cannons. We had two machine guns; they had twelve machine guns, a great advantage, of course. The worst problem was that we didn't have any decent shoes. Mostly I was afraid that my men would gradually get disgusted and leave. I really had to drive them forward to a faster pace, even though I knew they were exhausted. Anyway, we moved fast enough that we didn't lose our momentum, and entered Khabarovsk in December of 1921.



Raymond: Did the population fight against you?

Moltchanoff: No. Part of the population welcomed us; another part was very cold and reserved. But the most important thing was that we were able to take a lot of Soviet cannons--sixteen that were loaded on the trains, but which they had not evacuated. You see, I had studied the tactics of this situation years ago during maneuvers where we were pretending that we might have to defend this area against the Japanese. We chased the Reds as far as we could to the other side of Khabarovsk and reached almost to Daiyn. But the government at Vladivostok had not expected that we would take Khabarovsk so soon, and they kept burdening me with conferences and civil administration matters instead of letting me command my troops.

I left the Revolutionary Committee that had existed originally in Khabarovsk alone. This group had been organized in 1917 when the provisional government first came into power. They were certainly Socialist people, but they were fairly decent chaps, and I didn't bother them because I needed some kind of civil authority.

There were three newspapers that were coming out in Khabarovsk, but they came out with all kinds of nonsense, distorting news and even claiming that I was promising to go from Khabarovsk and attack Moscow. I was completely misquoted, and the headlines came out, "Moltchanoff Marches on Moscow." I suppose I still believed then that if the Russian people would see what bad people Bolsheviks were, there might be an internal overthrow, but I certainly hadn't claimed that I was going to march on Moscow. So I ordered the editors to come to me and threatened that unless they printed a full retraction of this, they would all be sitting in jail.

Raymond: How long did you keep Khabarovsk?

Moltchanoff: For about a month and a half. I evacuated it because I realized that I wasn't going to get any help from Vladivostok to maintain my power there. Furthermore, Blukher, who later on became a Soviet marshal, arrived from Chita with a number of crack Red troops and I had to evacuate Khabarovsk.

I wasn't even supported by those monarchist officers that Vladivostok was full of. I asked them to send me an old cadre officer to become military commander of the city of Khabarovsk, but I received nobody.



Raymond: In that case, would you say that your expedition on Khabarovsk was useless?

Moltchanoff: No, not at all. It was essential because it justified our existence, and it demonstrated to the people that we were still a military power. I marched in such a way as to make sure that there were no atrocities and that we paid for everything that we took from the population. The justification for the advance on Khabarovsk was more political than military. We would have had a military justification for this campaign had we had enough money to be able to gather and equip more men. Then we would have had a chance to advance further. For instance, if the Cossacks on the Amur would have risen against the Bolsheviks--but they didn't. I even sent a lot of agitators to try to get them to do so, but all that they succeeded in getting the Cossacks to do was to kill off a few commissars. The Cossacks wouldn't join me. They declared that they would join an uprising when all of the Cossacks would arise at one time. And, of course, this was impossible when we didn't have the money or the equipment to arm everybody.

When Blukher took command and began to counterattack us, he wrote me some letters asking me to end the war and offered me a military place in the Red Army commensurate to my own capacities and abilities.

Raymond: And you didn't accept?

Moltchanoff: No, of course not. How could I, being an anti-Communist, possibly go with them? I just simply didn't answer any letters. When his plenipotentiary asked me if I would give an answer, I said, "No, there would be no answer whatsoever." I received these plenipotentiaries, but I didn't expect to have any serious negotiations with them.

#### Last White Resistance in Soviet Russia

Raymond: Anyway, when did you retreat from Khabarovsk?

Moltchanoff: In February of 1922. We retreated slowly and we stopped for a while on the station Spask, which we held for a time. Later on we began to prepare ourselves to fight a last rear guard action against the Reds. By this time the most important commander in Vladivostok was General Dietricks. He was military commander and the civilian commander and almost



Moltchanoff: everything. I opposed this. I kept saying to him that his plans for a decisive counter-attack which would destroy the whole Far Eastern Red Army were perfectly developed according to the rules of military tactics, but the only problem was that we didn't have the kind of equipment to carry them off. I told him that the only cavalry commander who could possibly lead such an attack was General Nichalev, who was already in Harbin. He had enough cavalry spirit to carry off this fantastic attack. And I also said to Dietricks that even if we were to be able to beat this Far Eastern Army, we wouldn't win anything politically anyway because Blukher had great reserves. He was awaiting the arrival of another division, a full 9,000 men. And at this point all we could have possibly gathered using all the resources we had was no more than 8,000 men. And we could get no help from anybody.

So I said to General Dietricks, "All right, since I'm supposed to command I will do so, but I do not expect any success." But, of course, the main thing was that most of the population had no use for the Maritime government anyway. They often would inform me or my delegates whom I sent to their village and town councils that they were willing enough to subordinate themselves to General Moltchanoff, but not to the Maritime government. I think they did this because I supplied them with as much provision and grain for their sowing needs as I could and negotiated on their behalf with Chinese authorities for various supplies too.

Probably because of this, none of my bridges were blown up and I had no interruption of transportation. And the Cossacks went along with this and supported me. So none of this big attack near Spask ever materialized. We actually couldn't even concentrate our cavalry where we were supposed to because the partisans had tied it up. And I was forced gradually to retreat further and further. We went from Spask right to the Chinese border. The last point was called Posiet.

The Second Army Corps gradually retreated south on the road to Manchuria. The troops under my command retreated to Posiet and to the Chinese border. This was in the autumn of 1922. We had to surrender our arms there, and the Chinese were very nice to us and treated us very well. The Chinese commander of the border garrison liked me very much. He could speak Russian and would talk to me and nobody else because I had a beard. I knew that if I was going to China, I should have a beard, that the Chinese would respect me





Moltchanoff: more for that, and this proved to be true.

Raymond: So this was the end. This was the last White Army organized resistance to the Reds. When you crossed the Chinese border, the Russian Civil War was for all practical purposes over.

Moltchanoff: Yes, that is so.

Raymond: When you crossed the frontier the last time, did you know that this was the end of the White movement?

Moltchanoff: Yes, of course; everybody knew. There was no more hope. Some people wanted to continue resistance on the Kamcharka Peninsula, but I was totally against this. It was an inconceivable kind of a thing. General Pepeliaev went there, but it was just impossible. What would we do? Sit in Petropavlovsk, in one town? And from there would we get something to eat? Especially since the Reds were preparing to send a flotilla from the Baltic Sea against us there. And the Japanese themselves said that the Americans would get involved and not allow the Japanese to keep their own garrison there. So it was hopeless. In fact, we even knew that the English were transporting weapons on a British ship to the city of Okhotsk to sell them to the Reds, and we knew that the Reds would be supplied.

Then we decided to send Admiral Stark's flotilla to stop this English ship. I was at that time the chief of the city of Vladivostok and commander of an army corps as well as a commander of all of the coast guard, and all the police were subordinate to me. God knows, I spent hours and hours and hours on all this matter. I even had to negotiate with the railroad men, with the workers in factories, and God knows what else I was responsible for. Anyway, General Smirnoff took my place in all of these matters when I was leading my troops against Khabarovsk.

To go back to the ship, we stopped this English ship and sent them to Japan, but the Japanese would not release the ship because it was taking weapons to Communists. Then the head of the consulate corps, a Frenchman, demanded that I should come to him. And I replied to him that if the French consul wanted to see me he was welcome to have an audience with me. He arrived, and he was drunk. He protested about how we dared to stop an Allied ship. And I replied to him that we were standing with our backs to the sea and if it was necessary, we would fight the whole world because we had nothing to lose. He looked at me and he said, "Well,



Moltchanoff: you're right. Goodbye." And he went away.

### Last White General to Leave Russia

Moltchanoff: Let me go back to our crossing of the border into Manchuria. We crossed it near the town of Hunchun, which is at the very southernmost tip of the Russian territory in the Maritime Provinces. From Hunchun the crossing thereafter to Kirin was very difficult because Manchuria in this area is very mountainous. These mountains had no roads whatsoever, and I had to move five automobiles for which we managed to obtain gasoline for from Japanese who would sometimes sell gas to us. Also we had to resist Chinese brigands, and, of course, we had to do this while we were unarmed. Yet we marched in military formation to Kirin.

Raymond: Did you have any money?

Moltchanoff: Oh, yes. We had some money and also the Chinese helped us some too. That was Chinese Marshal Chang Tso-Lin who helped us.

Raymond: When did you arrive in Kirin?

Moltchanoff: Well, that was when the Sungari River was just beginning to thaw, so it must have been in March or April of 1923.

Raymond: Did you have any of your Izhevsky troops with you still?

Moltchanoff: Oh yes. Some of them were still with me.

Raymond: Would you tell me how you finally said goodbye to your army?

Moltchanoff: Yes. We were then stationed in the Chinese town of Kirin. They had our soldiers separately quartered from our officers, and we were guarded against brigands by a Chinese company with an officer. There were several generals among us. There was General Vershebitsky, General Putschkoff, General Khrushchev from the cavalry, and myself. I think that's all. And then the officers. All the soldiers were in another camp. Anyway, I got permission from the Chinese authorities that there be a Russian officer in each group of enlisted men to keep order. We were forced to permit all kinds of Soviet agitators there, even former Russian officers who tried to convince my soldiers to go back to Soviet Russia. There were some of these agitators who got beaten



Moltchanoff: up. I don't know if they had any influence on anybody, but we used to beat them. And then new ones would accept the assignment to come talk to us.

Raymond: Why did these soldiers, not the officers but the soldiers, who realized that the White movement had finally been crushed, decide not to go back to Russia?

Moltchanoff: They decided to stay in China because they realized that there would be no path for them in Russia at all. A few of the ones who had gone back to Russia before had written letters telling the rest of us that they were never allowed to return to their native towns of Izhevsk or Votkinsk but that they were kept far away in outlying areas. The administration of the Chinese Far Eastern Railroad was also very cooperative in finding a lot of jobs for my men.

Raymond: What about you yourself personally?

Moltchanoff: Well, I didn't even think of anything until such time as the whole army would get relocated. Some of my soldiers went and became fishermen; others remained in Harbin and went to work on the railroad. In Harbin there was a forestry and lumber mill under the owner Svidersky. This man was a wonderful person, and very eager to help our soldiers get good positions and find them jobs--not only officers, but rank-and-file soldiers too. Also, I'm not sure, I think his name was Kirprianov, an engineer, who organized a Monarchist society among the railroad workers, who said that there must be a boss in the Russian land and this man should be from the House of Romanoffs. He helped our officers and soldiers very often.

Raymond: How long did you stay in Kirin?



## IX STAY IN JAPAN

Moltchanoff: Oh, until April of 1923. And then the Chinese and Japanese doctors in Kirin told me that I should leave because of the bad condition of lungs and of the heart of my wife. For some time I received from the Kipin general government the order to leave to other cities to the south of China.

Raymond: I never asked you, General Moltchanoff, when did you get married?

Moltchanoff: In 1918. My wife and I decided to go to Japan, to the resort town of Atami, which is close to Yokohama and which is on the same gulf, as Japan's authority allowed.

Raymond: What money did you have to do this with?

Moltchanoff: Oh, I had some money. I had been given five thousand gold dollars, which I was entitled to as a commander, at the last moment by the government in Vladivostok. Anyway, my wife and I went, and the permission that the Japanese had given us was based on the condition that I would go on my own means, and that I would have no right to turn to the Japanese government for help and that I would not stay in Japan permanently, and there were some other conditions. Anyway, as I was traveling I was always watched and always Japanese policemen attended me. They all knew me and treated me with the great respect that is due a general. I wanted to take a ticket on a Japanese ship for second class, but they wouldn't allow me this because they said that this was not befitting my rank and put me in first. They told me where to go on the trains and where to eat and took all





Moltchanoff: my goods and helped me with them.

Raymond: How long did you stay in Atami, General Moltchanoff?

Moltchanoff: Just a short time because it was very expensive for me to stay there. I had to pay five yen per day for room and additional money; I think two and a half yen a day for food for me and my wife and my son. Of course, they fed us very well, but I didn't have all that much money and I couldn't afford to stay there.

Raymond: How did you decide to go to America?

Moltchanoff: At one time I had thought that I would go to Serbia, but one of the former secretaries of our Russian Consul General in Yokohama said that there would be no problem if I wanted to go to the United States. He said, "Everybody goes to America now." I said, "Well, I know nothing of the English language." And he said, "Oh, don't worry about it." This was approximately in June of 1923.

During the last part of my stay in Japan I lived in Yokohama, which was cheaper and I had more room and it was more comfortable.



## X MOVE TO AMERICA

- Moltchanoff: The former consul helped me get the visa from the United States, which at that time was a very easy thing to get. All I had to do was to have an inspection of my eyes and lungs, sort of a surface inspection, to make sure that I didn't suffer from trachoma, and that's all. So I got my visa right away. And I went on an American ship, "President Madison." I arrived in Seattle in August, the 9th, of 1923, and after three days I went to San Francisco because one of the younger generals, General Sakharov, had already gone to San Francisco, and anyway I longed to go to California because this is sort of a country within a country. And for the climate, of course; Seattle's climate is much harsher.
- Raymond: What were your hopes for the White movement at the time you first arrived in California?
- Moltchanoff: I'll tell you. I still thought we might return, that somewhere all of us would be able to take part in this situation, but I always thought that it would start from Paris, that this was where the start would be.
- Raymond: Then you did not consider that there was any point for you to stay in China like so many other Russians did?
- Moltchanoff: No, I didn't, because I thought that everything would start in Paris. The ones who stayed in Manchuria did it because it was close to Russia.
- Raymond: General Moltchanoff, why did you not wish to remain in Harbin in Manchuria like other former military men did and take part in various raids on Soviet territory that were organized there for a number of years?



Moltchanoff: I considered all these raids as totally useless and only good for creating deaths and killing people--that they didn't have any military or political possibility of success. And when I came to America I completely broke with my past.

Raymond: Why didn't you go to Paris then, General?

Moltchanoff: I didn't because I felt that I had to stay in America and begin to earn a living.

### White Russian Emigres in California

Raymond: I am very interested in what you thought of the Russian emigre life in California at the time you first came here.

Moltchanoff: I knew nobody. I did not know anybody here. I only met people through the church. This is the Holy Trinity Cathedral on Green Street and Van Ness. This is how we became acquainted; this is how we got ourselves situated and helped each other. There were a lot of people here before the Revolution and even some who came here during the Revolution. For instance, there were people here who participated in the Far Eastern Republic in Siberia for a while, people who had left as draft dodgers before World War I, and, of course, the priest who served in the church which was built by a gift from the Emperor. I also met people here who had been revolutionaries and atheists and who had left Russia because they were opposed to the Tsarist government.

Raymond: What was the name of the Russian priest here at that time?

Moltchanoff: His name was Father Vladimir Sokovich, who died in 1931. He had cancer. And all our Russian community life was organized around him. Atheists as well as Christians. When we came here in 1923 there were only two boatloads of us, and even so there was not enough room for people to get into the church and people had to stand around the church. At that time there was plenty of work, as far as anybody was willing to do heavy work. People would even grab you by the hands and feet to do this--to work on the railroad and in other heavy work. Of course, many people left from here to go to the country, and a lot of people--the smarter ones maybe--went to places where there were no Russians so as to learn how to speak English faster and better. There weren't any shops here, no Russian center, no Russian club,



Moltchanoff: nothing. Then, of course, quite a few men from Harbin arrived, and they started buying apartment houses.

Raymond: What about the sailors from the Stark flotilla?

Moltchanoff: Oh, yes. They came, but they didn't have any money with them. And they weren't really sailors so much as soldiers who had been mobilized into the fleet.

Raymond: What about your Izhevsk soldiers?

Moltchanoff: They arrived much, much later-- many of them after the Second World War from Shanghai.

Raymond: What about Colonel Efimov?

Moltchanoff: Oh, he arrived in 1923, a few months after I did.

Raymond: What was your impression of America?

Moltchanoff: Oh, a rich country. I considered that this was a very rapidly developing country, very exciting, and, of course, we always considered that California was a very special kind of place in America.

So anyway, I didn't know the language, and I decided that I'd have to do manual labor because I couldn't speak English. It was well paid, and what else could I do? I didn't want to occupy myself with speculation or little business deals. That wasn't my style; I was never a trader. So the first year I worked in the Del Monte cannery and made 40 cents an hour. Often we worked 14 hours a day. There were quite a few of us Russians working there--General Sakharov, Colonel Efimov, Boris Shebeko, and all kinds of other old veterans of the White Movement. We worked so hard that we really had a reputation for loading and unloading fruits. We worked much harder than the natives did, of course.

Later, in 1924, I went and rented a farm in Sonoma County to raise chickens, but this was a bad time, because just as I bought it, the small chicken farms started closing up because there was a bad discrepancy between the price of chicken and the cost of feed. So I spent three years there, lost all my money, and came back to San Francisco in 1927 with fifty dollars in my pocket, rented a house and started working in a shipyard as a painter. And from 1928 until





Moltchanoff: retirement I worked in one building downtown as night superintendent. And I retired when I was 81 years old.

Raymond: General Moltchanoff, why did the White movement lose, and what would you do about changing its mistakes if you could?

Moltchanoff: The Whites lost because there were a lot of partisans against us all round us in Siberia. What we did not have was an ability to lean on the people and get the people's support. Had we been able to come to the people from some direction or other, things might have been different, but we were not able to do this. The Russian people are not just a devout people; they can also be beasts, and with them you have to deal in that fashion.

Raymond: What do you think was the main mistake of Kolchak and of the White movement in Siberia?

Moltchanoff: I think the mistake lies in the whole history itself because we did not have enough statesmen, and our army was not prepared to handle any civil matters. During the Tsar's days the military had no right to be involved in politics, and among our older commanders there weren't enough men of statesmenlike ability. Kolchak was not; Denikin was not, and this is what created our defeat.

Raymond: From your own personal career, what would you have liked to have changed if you could from the period of the Civil War?

Moltchanoff: Again the same thing--my relationship to the people. I, more than anybody else, know my mistakes. I made many mistakes, but also one learns from mistakes.

Raymond: What do you hope will happen to Russia now?

Moltchanoff: Well, maybe my hope is that the youth will stand up. No White can possibly help them today. The Russian people will suffer for a long time and then finally it will explode. But today it can only come from the inside. Something new is happening today in Russia. The youth of Russia from the universities, the poets, they know what is going on. And once the masses get hold of weapons and the revolution starts, the present regime will fall. Of course, it will never never be a Tsarist Russia; it will be a democratic Russia. But it will not be the Communist society of today. I personally will not live to see this day, but I am sure this will happen. And I think that the main strength that



Moltchanoff: a democratic Russia can be built on are the zemstvo organizations.

I learned a lot from the civil war in Siberia. I from the beginning have been saying that the Vietnamese War will be lost by America because how can you possibly struggle in a war, fight in a war, where the population is willing to attack you from the rear, like the Vietnamese are doing and like what was happening to us in Siberia? They will talk with you and they'll tell you how much they love Americans and work for you, and then when they have a chance they will shoot you.

Raymond: Why was the population in Siberia then for the Reds and not for the Whites?

Moltchanoff: It was not for the Reds or for the Whites. The population just didn't know anything and didn't want to be involved in the fighting. The population didn't help us much and certainly didn't help them much either. And you see, I don't blame the people who hesitated in helping us, because they had no assurance that we would stay there and certainly I didn't have any assurance that I would be able to stay there either. And whenever the Reds returned they would really give it to anybody who helped us.

Raymond: General Moltchanoff, let me ask you what kind of an impact did the Russian emigration make upon California?

Moltchanoff: There's a lot of things that the Russians contributed to California. For instance, look at Fort Ross. Look at our Orthodox religion which so many native non-Russian Americans are joining. And, of course, one of the lowest percentages of crime by statistics is among the Russian emigration because most of the people who came here were intelligent, well-educated, and those who went through the army were well-disciplined.

Raymond: General Moltchanoff, if there was today an overthrow of the Communist rule in Russia and there were no longer any Communists, would you return to Russia then?

Moltchanoff: No, I would not. I would remain here. I would be a completely alien person there. Maybe I have some relatives left there; I don't know. But I don't really want to see them. They would really upset me. They would talk about things that I know nothing about, about the construction that happened after I had already gone, and there would be nothing to talk about.



Raymond: My last question, General Moltchanoff. During the years that you have been here, America has changed a great deal. Where in your opinion is America going today?

Moltchanoff: I think that America is going to an even greater progress. And if I had gone to sleep in 1923 and woke up today I would never recognize San Francisco. I don't think that the disturbances that we feel today are all that serious. Of course, it's a little hard to stop them because of the fact that Congress is restraining the President today. And it's possible even that there might be for a short period some kind of a form of dictatorship here. Some President will come along who will be able to mobilize the people. I am not a pessimist as far as America is concerned, nor about Russia. I think eventually the Russian people will be happier.

Raymond: One last thing, General Moltchanoff, when did you get married the second time?

Moltchanoff: In 1941. My first wife died in 1931, and in 1941 I married again. I have a grown son from my first marriage who lives in Danville and works for the Del Monte Company in San Francisco. He has three children, so I have grandchildren now. His oldest child is twenty years old. California, even despite some of these little disturbances, has a beautiful climate and there are so many different nationalities. Everybody contributes something, and there's a great deal of cultural life. It is a beautiful state, and I'm glad I came here.

Raymond: General Moltchanoff, you were a commander of the Izhevsk Division. Are there many of your former soldiers left with you?

Moltchanoff: Yes. We get together once a year in August. The year before last we celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of the Izhevsk uprising. We got together, and we decided to meet until there's only one man left, and then he will get drunk and will die.



Boris Raymond was born of Russian parents in Harbin, China, in 1925. His father, Dimitry Romanoff, had been a young officer of the Imperial Guards during the First World War. After the Revolution he found himself in Siberia, in the ranks of Admiral Kolchak's White armies, with which he eventually retreated through Siberia to China, where Mr. Raymond was born. Mr. Raymond's maternal grandfather, Boris Ostroumoff, played a prominent role in Manchuria as general manager of the Chinese Far Eastern Railroad.

Mr. Raymond was educated in French and British schools in Tientsin, Shanghai, and Saigon. In April of 1941, he came to San Francisco, where he graduated from George Washington High School in 1943.

After serving in the United States Army and seeing combat as an infantryman in Europe, Mr. Raymond returned to California, where he began his studies at the University of California, Berkeley. He received the B.A., M.A. (Sociology), and M.L.S. degrees from this institution. In 1964 he joined the University Library staff as Russian bibliographer. He became Assistant Director of Libraries, University of Manitoba in Canada, in 1967. He is presently (1972) a teacher in the Department of Sociology, University of Winnipeg in Canada, and is continuing his research on the history of Russian emigration.





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HEMATOLOGY AND ONCOLOGY

January 11, 1975

The Moltcanoff Family  
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San Francisco, California 94116

Dear Mrs. Moltcanoff and Family:

I would like to express my condolences on the recent passing of Victorin. Unfortunately he had a severe, advanced state of cancer, with total esophageal blocking, thus not allowing him to eat, and also causing him great discomfort during his last month of life. Sometimes death is welcome, because it is only then that the suffering can cease. Unfortunately this was the case with Victorin, and now he is at peace.

One has to admire his determination and courage, because he full well knew what was going on, and was able to discuss his problems as well as his future. He made the choice himself that to just gain a few more weeks or months of life with another operation, which would not cure him of his disease, but only allow some additional calories, was certainly not his way of life. He must have been a very proud person, and knowing that he was a general in the Russian Army, one has to assume his aristocratic background, and I am sure that this type of training as well as upbringing made him the strong person that he was throughout his life.

It is very hard when one is clear of mind and knows what is going on, and has to face such decisions. Yet it was his choice, and I feel rightly, that a certain course be planned. Fortunately for Victorin, he got his major wish. He did not like hospitals, and he wanted to go home. Because of the devotion of his family and their constant care, he was able to enjoy at least some of the peace and serenity of his home rather than spending his good remaining time within hospital walls. He preferred it this way, and I fully appreciate the efforts, frustrations and aggravations of taking care of a terminal cancer patient. His needs were met, and this is in some respects the return of love and devotion through the care required during the last few weeks of life.

Death came a little faster than I would have expected after admitting him to the hospital, although just looking at him I knew that he was approaching that time, but did not know when. He went



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to sleep quietly, and his suffering is now over.

Hopefully there will come a time in the future when physicians will be able to do a better job with cancer cases, but a great deal of research still has to be done and new treatments have to be developed.

I hope that all will go well for all members of the family in the future. I also hope that you never have to go through such a tragedy in your lives again.

I wish to thank you again for the assistance you afforded to Victorin, which made the physician's role easier through your meticulous and supportive and direct care.

If there are any questions, or any way I can help you in the future, please let me know.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'E. Rosenbaum', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Ernest H. Rosenbaum, M.D.

EHR/fs























